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**UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT  
OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN  
ORGANIZED SPORT ON FAMILY FUNCTIONING**

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OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN  
ORGANIZED SPORT ON FAMILY FUNCTIONING**

**by**

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, the inspiration behind the direction my studies have taken. They give me purpose in life.

## **Acknowledgements**

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# **UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN ORGANIZED SPORT ON FAMILY FUNCTIONING**

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Families provide individual members with a means of financial, social, and emotional support (Lavee, McCubbin & Olsen, 1987; Minuchin, 1985). Individuals have sought ways to improve family functioning in order to aid in personal development and the betterment of society (Broderick, 1993). Past research has shown that families that play or recreate together are likely to have higher levels of functioning (Orthner & Mancini, 1991). Youth sport has also been shown to be an external system that can provide a context that can lead to positive outcomes (Ewing et al., 2002). High functioning families set and achieve goals, regulate external boundaries, manage internal communications and regulate space within the family (Broderick, 1993). Coakley (2009) notes that the emphasis in youth sport in the U.S. has shifted towards a focus on skill development. With this shift, the time and financial demands on families for participation in these sport leagues has increased as well. While we know much about how families support sport participation, we know little about how this participation impacts families. This study seeks to answer the following research questions: What elements of the youth sport experience place particular demands on the family system?

How do the aspects of family functioning interact with sport to mitigate the effects of the demands placed on the family from participation from youth sports?

Seven families with at least one child participating in elite youth sport were interviewed. The data showed that families are willingly engaging with these leagues despite the stress they place on the family. Large financial and time demands are placed on the family that impacts the family in various ways. Elite youth sport is given high priority that may impact the marital dyad and the non-athlete sibling. Despite the additional strain that these leagues place on the family, families are still making a series of trade-offs to enroll in these leagues for the skill development of their child.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction:**

Families play a vital role in our society, providing members with a means of financial, social, and emotional support as well as personal development (Lavee, McCubbin & Olsen, 1987; Minuchin, 1985). Researchers and practitioners continue to find ways to enhance family functioning on the basis that more functional families lead to greater well-being for family members and ultimately to a healthier and more stable society (Broderick, 1993). Families are able to serve a number of roles when they are functioning at a high level. High functioning families set and achieve goals, regulate external boundaries, manage internal communications and regulate space within the family (Broderick, 1993).

One way that has often been proposed for families to enhance their functioning is to play or recreate together. Family scholars have suggested that there is a positive relationship between family leisure activities and positive family outcomes (Orthner & Mancini, 1991). For example, in a 5-year longitudinal study, Hill (1988) found a significant relationship (when controlling for other variables that impact stability) between shared leisure time and lower divorce and separation rates. Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) found that different types of family leisure activities have the ability to strengthen the bonds within a family and allow the family to become better at adapting to new situations. The leisure context provides a safe environment to enhance communication, and shared activities can increase bonding within the family and enhance overall family cohesion (Orthner & Mancini, 1991). In addition, family functioning may be improved through leisure activities, including enhanced adaptability from the unpredictable nature of leisure activities.

Additionally, not all families function or are structured in the same fashion. Family structure can vary in many different ways. The number of family members, the marital status of the parents, and whether or not any or all of the children are adopted are just a few ways in which family structure can vary. Beyond structure, some families function in different ways. The level of closeness between family members and the type of communication utilized can vary greatly (Broderick, 1993). There is not one type of family structure or functioning that is best for all families. Both negative and positive impacts can be associated with a variety of family structures and functioning.

Youth sports also provide a context in which many positive outcomes may occur for families and individuals (Ewing et al., 2002). These include, but are not limited to, physical fitness, self-esteem, social skills and the ability to make moral decisions (Ewing et al., 2002). Parents often enroll their children in sport leagues in the hopes that the child will reap these positive individual benefits and maintain a healthy lifestyle (Coakley, 2006). Families have seen increased levels of communication and increased levels of cohesion (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). What research has shown, however, is that positive development does not automatically occur for children enrolled in sport and their families (Coakley, 2009). In fact, many negative outcomes are also associated with youth sport, including cheating, high injury rates, high burnout, and a drain on family resources such as time and money (Cote, 1999; Frey & Eitzen, 1991; Thompson, 1999).

Clearly, not all physical activities are equal when it comes to their impact on individual and/or family functioning. While there is support that positive outcomes are associated with both family play and participation in organized sport, there are definite

costs or negative outcomes associated with participation in organized youth sport.

Further, it is unclear what conditions are beneficial or hurtful for family functioning.

The purpose of this study is to understand the relationship between organized youth sport participation and family structure, and how these two spheres, individually and in combination, impact family functioning.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions. What elements of the youth sport experience place particular demands on the family system? How do the aspects of family functioning interact with sport to mitigate the effects of the demands placed on the family from participation from youth sports?

This study has the potential to contribute to family systems theory by investigating the interactions of families with their environment, and how they adjust and respond to the situations and complexities of participation in youth sport. It contributes to the sport management literature by examining how sport design and implementation impacts families. Practically, the findings from this study could provide information to families about how to successfully choose among sport options and navigate the youth sport experience. It could also help sport managers improve the design and implementation of their sport programs such that participants and their families are able to have an excellent sport experience and sustain their participation, while maintaining a high level of functioning with their families.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **The Meaning and Influence of Sport**

In order to identify family and sport factors that affect family outcomes associated with youth sport, a distinction must first be made between play/leisure and sport. This distinction helps demonstrate the wide variance in sport-type activities and how the nature of the sport experience may matter towards family inputs and outcomes.

#### **Play/Leisure Activities vs. Organized Sport**

It has been suggested that sport and play exist on opposite ends of a continuum of physical leisure activity (Figler & Whitaker, 1991). The factors that determine where an activity will fall on the continuum are based on level of freedom, rules, structure and other similar factors. Play is on one extreme, and is noted as having high levels of freedom and an absence of rules, structure or outcomes. Sport, on the other hand, is characterized by low levels of freedom, rigid rules, standardized structures and an emphasis on outcomes (Figler & Whitaker, 1991). Frey and Eitzen (1991) state that the institutionalization of sport at higher levels of competition has begun to reflect a corporate model that is outcome based and features more rules and rigidity. This can be seen in organized youth sport in the United States as adults have exerted more influence on rules and the emphasis has shifted away from fun and play toward individual skill development (Coakley, 2009).

#### **Play/Leisure Activities**

Play and leisure activities exist on one side of the continuum of physical leisure activities. Zabriskie and McCormick (2001) define core family leisure activities as “common, everyday, low-cost, relatively accessible, and often home-based activities that



many families do frequently” (p. 283). Balanced family leisure activities, on the other hand, require more family resources, do not take place at home and “are depicted through activities that are generally less common and less frequent than core activities and that therefore provide novel experiences” (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001, p. 283). Core family leisure activities and balanced family leisure activities have been found to have a positive impact on the family (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). These impacts include, but are not limited to, increased closeness between family members and higher levels of communication.

In line with the continuum of physical leisure activity, play and informal sport can be defined as either a core family leisure activity or a balanced family leisure activity, depending on the location of the activity. Examples that could be core or balanced family leisure activities include tag and four-square, along with more structured games like kick-ball, whiffle ball or sports organized and facilitated by the participants.

### **Organized Sport**

Conversely, organized sport exists on the opposite end of the spectrum, and does not fit into the leisure model as posited by Zabriskie and McCormick (2001). It is too costly to be considered a core leisure activity and occurs too frequently to be novel as in a balanced family activity. With this distinction from leisure activities, a clear understanding of how sport differs from leisure activities needs to be established.

Coakley (2009) notes that there has been a shift in the focus of many American parents/families from play and physical activity to that of skill development in sport. As youth sport in the U.S. has moved to this model, the time and financial demands from participation in many sport leagues or clubs has increased as well. Frey and Eitzen (1991)

add that this shift from play to organized sport moves the locus of control from the participant to the manager and/or coach. Sport becomes more of a commodity and associated with work as opposed to a recreational activity with an emphasis on fun.

While family leisure activities involve the family collectively engaging in activities that are interactive, organized youth sport is characterized by authoritative rules and regulations with typically one participant from the family engaged at any one time (Coakley, 2009; Orthner & Mancini, 1991). Clearly this is a different context than family leisure. Organized sport's lack of input on rules and inclusive participation may not produce the same positive benefits for the family that leisure activities have been shown to produce. One example could be that by limiting participation to one or two family members, the family does not have the opportunity to enhance communication in the same way that an activity that actively engaged all members might provide (Orthner & Mancini, 1991). This does not mean that organized sport is necessarily bad for families, but that it needs to be explored as its own context, and not lumped together with more leisure and play experiences.

### **Organized Sport and the Family**

In a review of literature on the positive and negative impacts of youth sport on development, Fraser-Thomas, Cote, and Deakin (2005) found that program design, parental influence, and coach influence all have an impact on whether the sport experience will be positive or negative for the child. They propose a model that includes three suggestions for policy makers in how to structure sport for positive development. First, they suggest, "Policy-makers must assure the accessibility of youth sport programs to all youth, regardless of socio-economic status, race, culture, ethnicity, or gender" (p.

32). Second, they propose, “Programming must be driven by theoretical and applied research in the areas of youth sport and positive youth development, and give particular consideration to general subject matter, specific learning settings, and methods of instruction” (p. 32). Third, they argue, “Coaches and parents play a critical role in determining the quality of youths’ experiences and subsequent outcomes in sport” (p. 33).

Given the suggestions from Fraser-Thomas et al. (2005) and what their research has shown in terms of variables that impact youth participant experience, and the distinction between sport and family leisure activities, it is likely that both family variables and youth sport variables will affect the relationship between youth sport and the family.

### **Family Variables**

Family variables that impact the athlete experience include both parental and sibling input. Parents who did not place pressure on their children to be successful, but remained supportive were more likely to have engaged athletes (Dixon, Bruening, & Warner, 2008; Fraser-Thomas, Cote, & Deakin, 2008). Athletes who were granted levels of freedom and had parents open to dropping a sport and trying new ones were also more likely to be engaged. Conversely, parents who attempted to coach their children, offer incentives for winning and/or pressured them to remain on the team were more likely to cause their child to drop out (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). Siblings also played a significant role in the athlete’s experience. Siblings who were supportive of the athlete and did not engage in rivalries had a positive impact on the athlete and allowed them to remain engaged with their sport (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). In addition to variation in

how both parents and siblings engaged with the athlete, variation in the youth sport experience also impacted the athletes.

### **Sport Variables**

Fraser-Thomas et al. (2008) found that sport variables that change the focus of participation from one of fun and enjoyment to one that emphasizes skill development are among the leading causes of dropout. These variables include practice orientation, coaching style, and amount of free time removed from sport. Athletes who participated in organizations that were structured towards rigorous practice, less supportive coaches, and more restrictions on free time away from sport were more likely to dropout (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). On the other hand, athletes who were in organizations that structured practice to include games, had supportive coaches and had time for other activities were more likely to be engaged in their sport (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008).

Given the research, it appears that the type of youth sport experience matters for the participant. Experiences that are characterized with higher degrees of freedom and less restricted by rules, and those that feature an environment with greater levels of support may be better for participants than those that are more restrictive of free time, less supportive, and more demanding of rigorous practice.

### **Roles of the Family in Youth Sport Participation**

While family variables have been shown to have both a negative and positive impact on participant experience, other scholars have examined the relationship between sport and the family. Cote (1999) found that families play a variety of roles for children as they progress in sport.

**Socialization.** Typically, the family's first role in youth sport participation is through socializing the child into a sport league, and providing numerous sporting opportunities for the child to engage in. Dixon et al. (2008) and Coakley (1987) specifically stated that parents who are former participants themselves are more likely to initiate the socialization process of their children into sport. Beyond influencing children into beginning their sport involvement, parents also socialize children towards their sport achievement orientation and influence later sport socialization on whether or not to pursue elite sport (Kay, 2000). As the child matures, the number of sports in which he or she participates in declines and the role of the family shifts in order to accommodate the increases in scheduling demands and the increase of emotional support (Cote, 1999).

**Financial and Time Resources.** Wiersma and Fifer (2008) also found that beyond the initial introduction and socialization, parents also provide instrumental (e.g., transportation, financial resources, etc.) support. One of the various demands that organized sport has on the family is consumption of resources (Dixon et al., 2008; Kay, 2000). Kay (2000) found in her interviews with 20 families of elite athletes that the financial commitment to participate in high-level sport was cited as the biggest issue for families' decisions to cease participation at this level. The financial burden of participation was also supported by other research a significant factor in the relationship between sport and the family, and how family members felt about youth sport participation in their lives (Dixon et al., 2008; Hellstedt, 1995). Families that felt the cost of participation was not fair were less likely to be engaged with the league or club.

Beyond financial commitment, families noted a large time commitment, which required what Kay (2000) refers to as an alteration in family activity patterns.

Participants noted that the time demands affected their daily schedule in a way that caused some parents to change vacation plans, or even sleep patterns. One way in which activity patterns may be changed is the large amount of time required to provide opportunities for deliberate practice for participants, which Ericsson, Krampe, and Tesch-Romer (1993) found is crucial for skill development. Thompson (1999) further supported this notion, as the mothers of elite tennis players she interviewed needed a large time commitment just to drive their children to tournaments and practice, usually sacrificing their own opportunities for participation in sport for their children's. In these studies, it was primarily a cost to the parents to provide financial and time support.

**Emotional Resources.** In addition to providing instrumental support in the form of time and money, families, particularly parents, also provide emotional support to participants (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). The emotional resources that are needed by the family are crucial for the athlete's well-being and continuation in sport. Whether it be a post-game talk, providing motivation or helping the child to maintain a balance between competition and fun, emotional support is crucial to maintain a positive experience for the participant (Wiersma & Fifer, 2008). Kay (2000) found that families typically believe that providing emotional support is also necessary for talent development. Many of the athletes that she interviewed stressed that without emotional support from their family they would be unable to remain motivated and persist in deliberate practice.

### **Individual and Family Outcomes**

With the variety of roles the family plays and the variables that all can have an impact on youth sport experience, it is important to understand the different outcomes for

both individuals and families related to the sport experience, and in particular to extend these outcomes beyond the parents to the entire family system.

**Individual.** Individual sport-related outcomes for family members may be positive or negative depending on a wide variety of the family and sport factors. Potential positive benefits for the participant may include talent growth, an increase in self-esteem or the development of persistence (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Negative impacts may include an increase in stress, a decrease in self-esteem or injury (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008; Kay, 2000). Kay (2000) found that some athletes experienced emotional highs and lows that were directly related to their performance in their athletic event. In some instances athletes will undergo high levels of stress, due to parental and coach pressure, and suffer from burnout and cease participation (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008). Other athletes will suffer injury from too much participation and some studies have shown as high as 21.5 % of athletes were asked to participate while injured (Engh, 1999).

For other individuals in the family, positive benefits may include an increased sense of pride for the participant's experience or the addition of more instances of socialization with other individuals. Kay (2000) found that some parents felt a greater sense of pride when their child was successful on the field or court. Negative impacts may include feelings of jealousy, resentment or a lack of time for other activities (Cote, 1999).

**Family.** In addition to positive or negative outcomes for individuals, it is plausible that families may also experience positive or negative outcomes, although these have received much less attention than outcomes related to participants and parents.

Potential positive outcomes include an increase in family closeness or improved family communication (Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001). Parents have also been shown to have lower levels of physical activity as a result of their children's participation (Dixon, 2009; Thompson, 1999).

Potential negative family impacts include feelings of jealousy or resentment, depletion of resources, or a conflict of family values with the values of the sport league (Cote, 1999). Mothers in Thompson's (1999) study cited that their entire family suffered burnout like symptoms from the time demands placed on the family to foster participation in youth sport. Siblings have also shown negative impacts of their brother or sister participating. Kay (2000) found that some siblings who did not participate felt jealousy toward the athlete and felt their relationship with their parents was not as strong as the relationship between the athlete and parents.

### **Summary**

While a few researchers have examined the effects of sport participation on individuals or families—such as the reciprocal socialization of parents (see Green & Chalip, 1997; Hasbrook, 1986)—the majority of studies have examined the unidirectional relationship of the family to sport, particularly how families can better support the high performance sport participation of children (Kay, 2000). The current literature base illuminates a few of the ways that individual family members, mostly parents, may be impacted by participation in youth sport. As youth sport in the U.S. trends towards travel-based teams with a focus on skill development, and away from more playful, leisure-type activities, it is crucial to understand what impact (both positive and negative) these contexts have on families.



## **The Meaning and Influence of Family**

The family, throughout shifting economic and social systems, continues to play a central role in society – a focal point for both human sustenance and development (Broderick, 1993; Bronfenbrenner, 1992; Masten and Shaffer, 2006). When families are functioning at a high level, they have the ability to provide security, love, health, and well-being for members which ultimately leads to positive human development and provides members a life quality they would not otherwise have (Lavee et al., 1987; Minuchin, 1985).

Poston, Turnbull, Park, Mannan, Marquis, and Wang (2003) identified 10 domains in which families play a role in the life quality of their members: family interaction, daily life, parenting, financial well-being, emotional well-being, health, physical environment, productivity, social well-being, and advocacy. Family interaction refers to the relationships between various family members and the type of communication environment the family has. Daily life refers to the common activities that regularly occur to facilitate both collective and individual needs. The parenting domain is the hands-on activities and interactions that occur between the adults and children within a family. Financial well-being is the family's ability to pay for both what the family needs and wants. Emotional well-being refers to the interactions and environment that allow individuals to grow emotionally and feel secure. The health domain pertains to the family's ability to provide access to health care, help meet dietary needs and both physical and mental health. The physical environment is providing safety, adequate space, and comfort for all members of the family. Productivity is the family's ability to provide opportunities for skill development so that members can

succeed in various activities of life. Social well-being refers to the relationships of family members with individuals who are external to the family. Finally, advocacy is the family actively seeking support for another member of the family.

By providing members with these 10 domains, the family ultimately serves as a means of individual or personal development. Individuals in the family are affected by the ongoing patterns that take place within the family (Minuchin, 1985). Development refers to both the behavioral change as well as the intellectual growth of individuals in the family (Minuchin, 1985). While development sounds as if it refers only to positive growth, Bronfenbrenner (1992) pointed out that the core of development is a change within the individual that can either be positive or negative.

Parents can pass on genetic conditions that affect the health of children and some families are unable to adequately provide material and financial resources that impact nutrition, health and well-being (Masten & Shaffer, 2006). In addition, some parents may provide a family environment rife with abuse and maltreatment, which is detrimental to positive development (Masten & Shaffer, 2006). Through both genetic conditions and the environment that they provide for members, families have a considerable impact on the development and overall well-being of family members.

### **Definition of Family**

Holtzman (2008) noted that the term family is dynamic and ever-changing. Some definitions include extended family, some state that you must be related by blood, and others have cited a common residence as a defining characteristic of a family (Broderick, 1993). Legally, families have been defined by marriage, adoption, or blood ties (Holtzman, 2008). Failing to meet one of these three criteria typically prevents a family

from garnering state recognition or sanction and has shaped traditional the traditional Western family to typically two married parents and their children (Holtzman, 2008). What a family means has broadened in the last decade, as some definitions now include cohabitation and gay and lesbian partners (Holtzman, 2008). Broderick (1993) defined families as “two or more persons, sharing a common residence, and related by blood, adoption, or marriage” (p. 52). When considering the more expansive definitions that include cohabitation, extended families and other related kin, in order to maintain a simple definition with application to his research, Broderick (1993) refers to those as family-like systems. For the purposes of this study, family will be defined as two or more persons, sharing a common residence, and partnered or related by blood, adoption, or marriage.

### **Family Systems Theory**

Given the complex nature of families and the variety of interactions that occur within a family it makes sense to view a family as an entire system as opposed to a collection of individual parts. Parsons (1951) noted that the components of a family must include diffuse social interactions, particularistic rules, affective relationships, and ascribed relationships. In other words, a family must have a variety of interactions that span a variety of situations, have flexible rules that apply to different members based on their familial role, have an expression of personal feelings and emotions and finally have status independently of others within the family. Studying the family members individually and combining the data will not present a complete picture of the family, as the whole family is greater than the sum of its members.

**Interrelationships of family parts.** The key to understanding a system as a whole is to focus on the interrelations between parts of the system. In the case of the family, the interrelations between parts refer to the interactions between family members. For example, if a decision is going to be made as to a sport in which to enroll a child, multiple interactions within the family will take place. The child might suggest some sports in which he or she is interested and discuss those with one or both of the parents. Or, the parents might discuss with each other what sport and league they feel is most appropriate for their child, both developmentally and logistically.

These relationships and negotiations are also reciprocal—going from parent to child, and child to parent, and inside and outside the family. In other words, people and relationships both influence and are influenced by other people and relationships. The reciprocal nature of relationships in the family and how, in the larger context, they work towards homeostasis within the family is paramount to understanding family functioning (Cox & Paley, 1997). In the above example, it is crucial to understand how and what influence each member in the family has on the final decision. If the members of the family feel that their influence on the decision was in line with their role in the family and the family resources were not exceeded, then the family should remain in homeostasis. If the reciprocal nature of the relationships is hindered and one member is too influential on the decision, it may not be what is best for the family unit and the family may shift away from its homeostatic position.

Just because the relationships are reciprocal, does not imply that they are random. In fact, a number of scholars suggest they are arranged hierarchically (Broderick, 1993;

Cox & Paley, 1997). The hierarchical nature of families is defined by the boundaries that exist between the subsystems.

In a family, the dominant subsystems are the marital, parent-child, and sibling subsystems. The boundaries between subsystems help establish roles and maintain family rules (Cox & Paley, 1997). For example, boundaries that allow members to function within their subsystem without constant monitoring provide members of that subsystem autonomy. In addition, subsystems at the top of the hierarchy do not exert unidirectional influence on lower subsystems. The influence between subsystems is reciprocal and travels both up and down the hierarchy. In families with rigid boundaries, the hierarchy is stronger and more authoritative in nature, while families with flexible boundaries are more democratic and children have more input.

Prior research has shown a positive relationship between different subsystems and subsystems and individual development (Cox & Paley, 1997). For example, a positive linear relationship has been shown between the parent-child subsystem and individual development. In addition, a positive linear relationship between the parent-child subsystem and marital subsystem has been supported in the literature (Cox & Paley, 1997).

While the majority of research on the family has focused on individuals and the subsystems that are composed of dyads, family therapists have noted the importance of expanding the research focus to triads and larger family units (Cox & Paley, 1997).

**External influences on the family system.** The level of interdependence, the flexibility of boundaries, and the ability of the system to be adaptive in response to

external forces to maintain stability and reorganize if necessary all play a role in how the family system exists and changes within the broader social context.

The external environment interacts cyclically with the family system. Individuals and families are affected by the external environment, which in turn affects the interactions they bring to the family system and existing subsystems. These interactions produce change within the family system and subsystems, which in turn interact with the environment. The interactions with the environment affect the environment and subsequent interactions within the family. This cycle is ongoing and helps shape and mold both the family system and the external environments with which it interacts.

One way in which parents are affected indirectly by the environment is reciprocal socialization. Hasbrook (1986) suggested that reciprocal socialization in sport might occur as children who demonstrate higher levels of ability elicit more encouragement from their parents. Her study, that examined 341 male and female high school athletes, demonstrated how one member of the family interacting with an external environment impacted the behavior of nonparticipant family members. The family members in Hasbrook's (1986) study treated the sport participant differently based on the performance of the athlete. Their interactions with the athlete were affected by the sport system in which a member of their family was participating. A study by Cote (1999) showed that younger siblings might also undergo reciprocal socialization in how some showed bitterness or jealousy towards their older siblings. Siblings in Cote's (1999) study began to show levels of resentment and jealousy towards their sibling as the amount of family resources (time and money) spent on the participant increased.

Broderick (1993), in work-based settings, found that family systems engage with five types of reciprocating effects that may also apply to sport. The first was competition for time. Every hour that a family member is participating in sport is an hour that is taken directly away from time spent with the family. The converse is also applicable; time spent with the family directly reduces time that could be spent practicing or traveling to a tournament.

The second type of reciprocating effect is spillover (Broderick, 1993). Spillover is the transfer of mood, style of interaction, and acquired skills. If the member of the family who is participating has a difficult game or suffers a loss on the playing field, he or she might bring that mood into the family system. The third type of reciprocating effects is indirect (Broderick, 1993). Indirect effects are composed of the factors that make up one's environment, that do not have a direct impact on the individual. These include the actual home he or she lives in, material possessions, or educational opportunities. Most indirect effects are determined by the annual income of the family. This in turn indirectly affects all members of the family.

Weak ties are the fourth type and include casual friends and acquaintances. They provide social influence to the family members they are associated with. This could include teammates, acquaintances from other teams, or coaches. The fifth type is media, which includes television, the internet, newspapers, and radio. Television content was found to have an impact on the vocabulary development of children, which in turn affected their future television preferences (Wright, et al., 2003). These five types of reciprocating effects that Broderick (1993) defined demonstrate how interactions travel both to and from the external system and the family. Given that members who do not

directly interact with external environments are still impacted, it is important to understand what impact the external environment may have on the family.

Lavee et al. (1987) defined two types of change that family systems undergo due to external interactions: normative and nonnormative (Lavee et al., 1987). Normative changes are expected or scheduled changes that are typically associated with task realignment or developmental goals. Task realignment examples could include enrolling a child in a youth sport league and developmental change could include when a toddler begins preschool. Nonnormative changes occur when an unplanned events elicit change within the family (Lavee et al., 1987). For example, if an athlete suffered a serious injury the family may have to undergo nonnormative changes, including altering work schedules to accommodate doctor's appointments, providing additional money for medical needs, and providing emotional support to the injured athlete. While some of these changes (time, money) are similar to the normative changes that would be expected with joining a sport league, their nature (i.e., they are not planned for) demonstrates a greater need of flexibility.

### **McMaster Model of Family Functioning**

Despite the varying definitions of family functioning that have been presented by scholars over the years, common themes are present among the varying models. Epstein, Bishop, and Levin (1978) created the McMaster Model of Family Functioning and broke these themes down into six dimensions: problem solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, and behavior control.

**Problem solving.** Problem solving is defined as “a family’s ability to resolve problems to a level that maintains effective family functioning” (Epstein et al., 1978; p.



21). Further, family problems are only those that create difficulties, and threaten the integrity and functioning of the family. Some issues are ongoing or may not threaten the integrity of the family, and would therefore not be considered problems. These could include minor disagreements, or other small issues that families deal with on a day-to-day basis. When issues build over time without the family addressing them, they may move from simply being an issue to becoming a problem. Problems are split into instrumental or affective. Instrumental problems are those related to the basic needs, including financing and housing. Affective problems are those that are related to feelings (Epstein et al., 1978). Families must be able to rapidly and effectively solve both instrumental and affective problems. This is similar to what Cox and Paley (1997) call adaptive self-stabilization. Adaptive self-stabilization refers to a system's ability to make changes internal to the system due to changing conditions in the environment (Cox & Paley, 1997). Specifically this would occur when a change in the environment leads to deviations within the family which trigger negative feedback to maintain homeostasis.

**Communication.** Epstein et al. (1978) defined communication as “how the family exchanges information” (p. 23). Like problems, communication is divided into both an instrumental and affective sphere. In addition, communication is broken down into four styles based on continuums of clear vs. masked communication and direct vs. indirect communication. The first style would be clear and direct and would include examples in which family members explicitly state the issue they are talking about to the individual that the message is intended. The second style is clear and indirect and would include examples in which the issue is explicitly stated, but what member it is intended for is not clear. The third type is masked and direct and includes examples in which the

issue is not clear, but the intended target is clear. The fourth and final type of communication is masked and indirect. Examples would be when both the message and target are unclear. Olson and Gorall (2006) refer to communication as a facilitating dimension that aids in maintaining homeostasis. It is thought that clear and direct communication lead to higher levels of family functioning and that masked and indirect communication hinder effective family functioning (Epstein et al., 1978).

Communication is also impacted by the rigidity of boundaries between subsystems. How rigid or flexible these boundaries between the subsystems are and how communication is facilitated between subsystems affects the way in which the children are socialized into the shared norms and values of the family (Broderick, 1993).

According to the social interaction model, learning and social development are a result of interactions and provide meaning to the social world in which the individual exists (Coakley, 2009). From a family systems perspective, the family would be the social world and the social development is the shaping of the children's values and behaviors by the cumulative effect of repeated interactions between parents and children (Broderick, 1993). In the family, the parents play the primary role in the socialization of the children (Masten & Shaffer, 2006). Through their interactions, they teach or expose children to traditions, norms and family values that serve as the child's earliest context for development (Masten & Shaffer, 2006).

**Roles.** Family roles are defined as “the repetitive patterns of behavior by which individuals fulfill family functions” (Epstein et al., 1978; p. 23). Like problem solving and communication, family roles are split into instrumental and affective. Functions are also split into necessary family functions and other family functions. Adaptive self-

organization refers to the family's ability to reorganize in response to external changes. An example of this would be how individuals deal with transitions, including divorce, a new child, or a death in the family (Cox & Paley, 1997). These transitions affect interactions at all levels of the family system and the family structure must change at multiple levels in order to remain stable. These transitions for the family do not occur at a specific moment in time, rather they progress as a process over a period of time. At any point in time a family can be undergoing the process of transition, which may temporarily have negative effects, but the ultimate goal is to adjust to the change by redefining roles and adjusting family rules in order to maintain stability in the family system. For example, if a child is enrolled in a youth sport league, the roles and rules of the family may need to adapt in order to accommodate the new demand. A parent may find himself or herself in a new role that provides transportation to the child. This time constraint may take away or eliminate activities in which the parent would have been involved, which involves a transition and a new balance.

**Affective responsiveness.** Epstein et al. (1978) defined affective responsiveness as "the ability to respond to a range of stimuli with appropriate quality and quantity of feelings" (p. 25). Instead of focusing on how they inform others about feelings, which is captured in the affective communication dimension, affective responsiveness focuses on the patterns of a family's response to emotional stimuli. These patterns are split into two classes, welfare feelings and emergency feelings (Epstein et al., 1978). Welfare feelings are those responses that are typically associated with love, tenderness, joy and similar emotions. Emergency feelings are those that would be typically associated with fear, anger, sadness or other similar emotions. Families that can feel love and joy, but not

anger or sadness would be restricted and their family functioning would suffer because of it. Effective families will offer a broader range of emotional responses and will utilize those in appropriate situations. For example, a family that is able to experience feelings of sadness after a difficult loss would be considered affectively responsive.

**Affective involvement:** The fifth dimension is affective involvement and is defined as “the degree to which the family shows interest in and values the activities and interests of family members (Epstein et al., 1978; p. 25). Epstein et al. (1978) give a range of possible involvement from lack of involvement, involvement devoid of feelings, narcissistic involvement, empathic involvement, over-involvement and symbiotic involvement. Lack of involvement includes situations in which family members who no interest in the activities of one another. The only involvement that they have is shared physical surroundings and instrumental functions (Epstein et al., 1978). Involvement devoid of feelings includes those situations where there is some interested, but almost no investment of feelings in the relationship. The third level is narcissistic involvement, which includes situations where the involvement is driven by egocentric motives and no emphasis is placed on the other person’s feelings or activities. The fourth level is empathic involvement and applies to situations in which the investment in the activities or interests of the other family member includes relevant feelings for the importance of the situation. Over-involvement is the fifth level and includes situations that are considered intrusive or overly-protective. The sixth and final level is symbiotic involvement and occurs in extreme cases in which involvement reaches a level of intensity in which the boundaries between two individuals become blurred.

One family variable that impacts the level of affective involvement present in a family is the flexibility or rigidity of internal borders. Minuchin (1974) observed three levels of family functioning that focused on border regulation: adaptive, disengaged, and enmeshed. Adaptive family systems have flexible boundaries to allow open communication and are characterized by mutually sensitive relationships between members. Despite having open communication, adaptive family systems also allow for an appropriate level (depending on the family) of autonomy. Disengaged family systems are characterized by angry and insensitive interaction between members and high levels of avoidance. Enmeshed family systems have boundaries that are too flexible, almost to the point where they are transparent. These family systems are characterized by a lack of autonomy and over involvement from one member to another.

In order for the family to function well, boundaries between subsystems should be rigid enough so that they are clear, but flexible enough so that individuals can access resources that are available in other subsystems (Cox & Paley, 1997).

**Behavior control.** Behavior control is defined as “the pattern the family adopts for handling [behavior] in three specific situations – physically dangerous situations, situations involving the meeting and expressing of psychobiological needs and drives, and situations involving socializing [behavior] both inside and outside the family” (Epstein et al., 1978; p. 26). Behavior control expands beyond simply child discipline; it regulates situations for adults as well that might include drinking, reckless driving or other situations where behavior control would be relevant. For each of the three areas of behavior control, families utilize four styles of behavior control: rigid, flexible, laissez-faire, and chaotic (Epstein et al., 1978). Rigid behavior control covers situations in which

the rule is very constricted and there is little or no room for negotiation. This might include situations such as drug use or driving the car alone. Flexible behavior control includes situations in which there is a reasonable amount of flexibility, given the context. This might include a situation in which curfew is extended by a short amount of time to allow a child to attend a concert with friends. Laissez-faire behavior control involves situations in which there is no standard rule and almost anything goes. Chaotic behavior control applies to situations in which the family shifts between behavior control methods in a fashion that confuses other family members. Flexible behavior control is typically considered the most effective for family functioning and chaotic behavior control is the most damaging.

### **Circumplex Model of Family Functioning**

Based on the constructs of cohesion, flexibility and communication, Olson and Gorall (2006) developed the circumplex model of family functioning. Olson and Gorall (2006) posit five levels of cohesion ranging from disengaged/disconnected to somewhat connected to connected to very connected to enmeshed/overly connected. Balanced levels of family cohesion exist in the middle three designations (somewhat connected, connected, and very connected) and the two polar ends are levels of imbalance. An imbalance in cohesion can occur through various actions. A change in the trust or values of a family system affects the loyalty and security of family members, which affects cohesion. Maintaining boundaries that are too rigid and limit bridging may lead to a situation where the family is too close and members do not have adequate space to remain functional. Additionally, the construct of time in the cohesion dimension often leads to dysfunction. If a member of the family does not feel that he or she has adequate

time either together with the family or time apart from the family then cohesion can fall into imbalance. For example, if a family member is working long hours and is not able to spend quality time with other members, cohesion is likely to be affected negatively as family members are lacking on togetherness.

Olson and Gorall (2006) also noted five levels of flexibility ranging from rigid/inflexible to somewhat flexible to flexible to very flexible to chaotic/overly flexible. Similar to cohesion, the central three levels (somewhat flexible, flexible, and very flexible) are considered to be balanced levels and the two polar ends are considered imbalanced. The flexibility of a family is likely to fall into imbalance when communication is poor and rules for the family are too rigid or too loose. This would cause issues when interactions with the external environment call for change within the family rules. If the family rules are too rigid then the family may be unable to deal with the flux that is caused by the interaction with the external environment. Family rules that are too loose might lead to confusion among family members and affect functionality. An example of external stress on the family might be in the form of a serious injury to a member in the family. If the injury prevents a member from fulfilling his or her role in the family, then inflexibility would not allow other members to shift their responsibilities to cover those obligations, which could lead to dysfunction. If the family was too loose with its rules, multiple members might attempt to fulfill those responsibilities even if he or she is unable to accomplish the task at hand. Often times the imbalance that occurs at either the cohesion or flexibility dimension is a result of poor communication within the family. Proper communication within the family aids in maintaining balance in both cohesion and flexibility.

Family systems are composed of hierarchically nested subsystems that adapt to changes to their environment in order to maintain homeostasis. Family hierarchy is defined by rules and boundaries that each family sets to allow high levels of family functioning. Borders need to be rigid enough to allow for a clear delineation of power and structure, but flexible enough to allow the system to adapt to internal and external stressors (Broderick, 1993). Stressors come from both internal and external sources, and may be even be reciprocal in nature. By maintaining appropriate levels of adaptability, cohesion, and communication, families are able to function at a level that provides optimal family well-being.

In sum, how families respond to stressors, both internally and externally is very important to family functioning (and presumably therefore also to the well-being and development of the family members). Past research has suggested that it may be more important how a family responds to stressors than the actual source of the stress (Broderick, 1993; Lavee & Olson, 1991). However, a number of sport scholars have suggested that youth sport may be an increasingly important source of stress on American families, especially when considering the increasingly prominent social status given to organized sport in the U.S. and the tremendous resources demanded of families who commit strongly to their children's participation (Coakley, 2009; Crocker et al., 2003). Parents play a vital role in shaping a child's involvement in sport, and the sport environment impacts not only the participant, but impacts the family unit (Coakley, 2009; Cote, 1999). Thus, it is important to understand how participation in organized youth impacts the family.



While both models of family functioning are widely accepted, for the purpose of this paper the McMaster Model of Family Functioning will be utilized. Given its broader range of dimensions, including affective involvement which directly applies to participation in organized youth sport, it is more relevant considering the population that this study focuses on.

### **Proposed Model of Sport Impact on Family Functioning**

Given a family systems perspective and the impact that sport has on the family, I posit that the impact of participating in organized sport on family well-being is affected both by family variables and sport variables.

One family variable that may affect the strength of the impact of participation in organized sport on family well-being is affective involvement. Given the six levels of affective involvement, it is likely that the level of involvement that other family members have with the sport will influence family functioning. Another variable that is likely to influence the impact of participation that has been documented in the literature is resources. Families that have an abundance of resources, including but not limited to, financial, job flexibility and time, may be more likely to handle the demands placed on them because of youth sport participation. Families that do not have the resources will resort to a series of trade-offs in an attempt to meet the demands, often impacting the entire family

Another aspect that is likely to influence the effects of participation in youth sport on the family is the nature of the organized sport experience itself. This includes, but is not limited to the cost of the league, the perceptions and goals of the coach, and the scheduling demands of the league.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions. What elements of the youth sport experience place particular demands on the family system? How do the aspects of family functioning interact with sport to mitigate the effects of the demands placed on the family from participation from youth sports?

## **Chapter 3: Method**

### **Qualitative Research and the Family**

Given the complexity and varying structure of families and how little research has been conducted on the impact of organized sport on family functioning, an inductive grounded approach was utilized in this study (Eisenhardt, 1989). Specifically, this study utilized multiple family cases to examine the major elements of the sport experience and family structural factors that impact family functioning. This type of comparative case-based research has the ability to simultaneously examine multiple facets of data to provide a holistic view of a complex situation. Through its use of multiple cases and different types of data, case study research also has the ability to generate new and novel theory.

The purpose of this study was to understand the impact of participating in youth sport on the family unit. In order to measure this impact and gain an overall view of family functioning, interviews with family members were conducted with an emphasis on both sport and family variables. Based on the research, it appears that both family variables and sport variables will impact overall family functioning. In order to control for some other potential variables like family size and composition, socioeconomic status, and sport experience, purposeful sampling was utilized to narrow the cases to certain family types and sport experiences.

### **Sampling**

Eisenhardt (1989) noted that the concept of population is crucial in case study research, as it has an impact on controlling variance and the generalizability of the study.

Therefore, families that are selected for this study had one child enrolled in a fee-based youth sport league that involved travel.

There are endless combinations of family types and structures (Broderick, 1993). Covering all of them would be nearly impossible and would lead to so much variance in the family make-up itself that the relevant family variables to the study could not emerge. Therefore, family parameters were limited to those that have two married parents at home and with at least two children.

In a similar fashion, sport experience can vary tremendously (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2005). Sport experience can fall anywhere on the continuum of physical activity, to engaging in free play in your backyard to living at a sport academy with a strong focus on skill development. To reduce this variability such that some of the core effects of the organized youth sport experience can emerge, the sample was limited to leagues that involve travel, and fee based participation.

Families participating in a travel based league and who have multiple children with whom to negotiate schedules and resources were most likely to experience stress that impacted the negotiation of family interactions and family well-being. These families, therefore, were selected for participation in this study.

Potential families were generated utilizing the researcher's personal network, but were not personally known to the researcher. Families who participated completed the McMaster Family Assessment Device (Epstein Baldwin, & Bishop, 1983) (see Appendix A). This device was used to assess the family's level of functioning on the six dimensions of family functioning in the McMaster Model of Family Functioning, in addition to an overall family functioning score.

## **Procedure**

Once families were selected, interviews were scheduled. The parents provided additional verbal consent to participate in the study for themselves and their children at the time of the interview.

Data was collected through semi-structured, in-person, one-on-one interviews with each family member. Interviews were semi-structured, open-ended and targeted at gaining insights into how the family functioning was affected by participation in the youth sport league. Questions were derived from Orlick's (1974) interview schedule designed to assess family sports environment and from the McMaster Family Assessment Device (Epstein et al., 1983). Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and one hour and were conducted at a location that was mutually acceptable to the researcher and interviewee. Data were recorded and field notes were written down at each interview. Once the interview data were collected, they were transcribed and used to inform subsequent interviews.

## **Measures**

### **Definition of constructs.**

***Family functioning.*** The McMaster Model of Family Functioning was utilized to guide the measure of family functioning (Epstein et al., 1978). The McMaster Family Assessment Device utilizes 53 items and generates valid scores for the six dimensions of family functioning, in addition to an overall assessment of family functioning. The six dimensions, defined earlier in this study, include problem solving, communication, role, affective responsiveness, affective involvement and behavior control.

***Sport variables.*** The demands from the youth sport league were assessed qualitatively based on the financial, time and emotional demands that participating in youth sport had on the family. These demands included travel time, practice time, emotional support and opportunity cost. Opportunity cost was defined as other activities that members of the family were not able to participate in because of a scheduling conflict with the sport league, a lack of funds or a lack of transportation. Expectations were what the parent's expectations of the sport league were in contrast or in synch with what the participant's expectations were. Expectations were defined as what the parents/participants hope to gain from participation in the league. In terms of measuring the quality of the youth sport experience, perception of the league and coach were utilized. Assessed qualitatively, perception of the league encompassed price, scheduling and facilities. The quality of the coach was assessed with qualitative data based on what both the parents' and participants' opinion was as to the quality of the coach. Quality was left open to the interpretation of the subjects.

### **Instruments.**

***McMaster Family Assessment Device.*** The McMaster Family Assessment Device is a self-report measure, valid for all family members over 12, that utilizes 53 items to assess family functioning (Epstein et al., 1983) (see Appendix A). The McMaster Family Assessment Device provides an assessment of families in terms of their problem solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, and behavior control. In addition, it provides a seventh scale to assess overall family functioning. The instrument has been found to be internally valid on all seven scales. Cronbach's alphas are as follows: problem solving (.74), communication (.75), roles

(.72), affective responsiveness (.83), affective involvement (.78), behavior control (.72), and general functioning (.92) (Epstein et al., 1983).

The scores from the McMaster Family Assessment Device were used as a general outcome measure to compare the families. It was used for descriptive purposes only as the sample size did not permit statistically meaningful comparisons.

***Interview instrument.*** The interview instrument was designed to assess six different dimensions of family functioning as described in this study. For both parents and children, the interview assessed time and scheduling demands, the sport experience, life outside of sport and their overall satisfaction and family well-being as well as threats to that well-being. (See Appendix B)

***Parent questionnaire.*** In addition to filling out the McMaster Family Assessment Device and the interview, parents filled out a descriptive survey that collected demographic information, financial demands for participation, and assessed the time demands for participation. (See Appendix C)

## **Data Analysis**

Interviews were transcribed and coded line-by-line with notes written in the margins next to the text. The similarities and differences were compared between the codes in order to generate a coding scheme (Glaser, 1978). Codes were then clustered in order to construct categories. This process continued with the influx of new data until saturation occurs. This happens when no new categories are generated from the codes. Categories were compared to one another and the relationships and integration of categories form the basis for the emergent theory (Glaser, 1978).

Once data was coded, the next step of data analysis in the comparative case method was within-case analysis. Data from each case study were written separately (Eisenhardt, 1989). By focusing on each case individually, unique patterns were allowed to emerge from the case prior to between-case comparison. Insights that were taken from each case were utilized to inform subsequent data collection.

The next step in the data analysis is between-case comparison. Yin (1981) argued that following analysis of the cases individually, between-case analysis allows the researcher to potentially build theory. Eisenhardt (1989) noted that many investigators get overwhelmed with data and may reach false conclusions. In order to avoid this pitfall within group similarities and intergroup differences among the constructs was conducted. Cases were also paired up in order to provide more focus for intergroup comparison and to generate new categories. At this point the emerging hypotheses and subsequent relationships were explained utilizing qualitative data to understand why the relationships existed (Yin, 1981).

Once the hypotheses and relationships were presented, the emerging theory was compared with literature that supports the emerging theory and literature that is in conflict with the emerging theory (Eisenhardt, 1989; Yin, 1981). Comparing the emerging theory with literature that is similar allows for phenomena that would not normally be compared to demonstrate stronger internal reliability and makes the emergent theory more generalizable. Comparing the emerging theory to literature that it is in conflict with, presents an opportunity for deeper insight into both the emergent and existing theory.



Data collection and analysis will continue until saturation has occurred and the benefit of adding new cases is outweighed by the theoretical contribution that each new case would add (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

## **Chapter 4: Results**

Following the method of case analysis presented by Yin (1981) and Eisenhardt (1989), the results are organized into three main sections. First, Table 1 provides a summary overview of all seven families. Next, the families are presented as individual cases, with a brief McMaster FAD analysis, an examination of their sport history, and details about their relationship with the elite youth sport league. Following the within-family analysis, the data are compared between families to show the emerging themes.

Table 1: Summary overview of the seven families

	Family	Entry	League Structure	Sport	League	Family	Family Support
	Composition	Pattern to Select Sport		Challenges	Support	Challenges	
Family 1	Married 16 years Father's occupation – restaurant owner Mother's occupation – stay at home mom Annual income – over \$200,000 Son (13) – plays select baseball Son (12) – plays rec lacrosse	Shifted from recreational baseball to select baseball at the age of 11 in order to enhance skill development	Independent Coach hired by parents Coach schedules games/tournaments \$1,200 per season Optional clinics Travel fees Season runs Feb.-July	Sporadic Scheduling Travel distance Communication	Direct input with coach Recently purchased practice facility Carpools	Overlapping sport seasons Father travels with work	High level of communication Father has flexible schedule High SES
Family 2	Married 15 years Father's occupation – Software engineer Mother's occupation – stay at home mom Annual income – over \$200,000 Daughter (13) plays Cello Daughter (11) – plays select soccer Son (9) – plays rec football	Peer influence Transitioned to select soccer when she was 9 to enhance skill development	Set Teams/Coaches Parents have no say \$1,300 per season \$300 equipment fee Travel fees per tournament Season runs	Communication Injury due to lack of follow-through Schedule Travel distance No say in coach	Carpools Consistent schedule	Overlapping schedules (3 children with activities)	Stay at home Mom Family activities removed from sport
Family 3	Married 18 years Father's occupation – student pastor Mother's occupation – teacher Annual income – under \$50,000 Son (10) – prep baseball and football Daughter (15) club volleyball	Started at her father's church. Played organized volleyball at the YMCA and then transferred select volleyball to seek out higher competition.	Club houses multiple teams and age groups Coaches select girls for teams, sometimes mid season \$3,500 in monthly fees \$600 initiation fee Travel costs Equipment costs	No loyalty (kids switch clubs on a regular basis) Time commitment Cost Travel distance to practice Coach turnover	Shared values (skill development) High level of competition	Money Schedule – both parents work Additional practice at home facilitated by father Son is limited to certain baseball teams based on schedule Overlapping schedules	Communication Church family Clear goals in sport (college scholarship)

Table 1 (continued)

Family 4	Married 19 years Father's occupation – Senior technical writer Mother's occupation – letter carrier Annual income - \$110,000 Son (8) Daughter (13) – select soccer Daughter (15) – select soccer	Played recreational soccer until the age of 8 and then transitioned to select soccer to seek out higher competition.	Club houses multiple teams and age groups. Coaches draft athletes in a tryout and two or three different coaches remain with team for the season. Annual league fee: \$1,415 \$200 equipment fee Up to \$1,000 travel fees for tourn.	Cost Varying levels of involvement by parents Multiple coaches per team. Perceived bias from coaches Time commitment	Fundraising opportunities Shared valued (skill development )	Schedule – both parents have jobs and all three children play sport. Mom's involvement in club Lack of upward communication Inequitable time spent on activities	Communication Cohesion Flexibility of mother's work schedule
Family 5	Married 13 years Father's occupation – food service executive Mother's occupation – midwife Annual income - \$100,000 Son (14) – elite hockey Daughter (18) – recreational hockey	Played a variety of recreational sports at a young age. At the age of 12 really developed as a hockey athlete. Tried home schooling for a year and then enrolled in hockey academy	League/School are one in the same. The hockey academy handles all transportation, scheduling, education, etc.	Cost Academy is located in a city 200 miles away from home.	All instrumental support is provided by the academy. In addition, they handle his schooling.	Physical distance between family members. Family is together every two weeks, otherwise they are split in two.	Communication (telephone and in person) Increased desire to be close due to physical distance Shared love of hockey from all four family members
Family 6	Married 17 years Father's occupation – tax enforcement officer Mother's occupation – administrative assistant Annual income - \$60,000 Daughter (9) Daughter (14)	Started playing recreational soccer at the age of 3. Transitioned to select soccer at age 11 to seek out higher competition.	Large league, housing multiple teams and multiple age groups. Coaches draft girls to team. \$1,400 league fees/tournament fees Additional fees	Cost Lack of transparency Additional fund raising Parent gossip Time commitment	Shared values (skill development ) College recruiting assistance (additional fee)	Disinterested sibling Pressure from father Financial means Father works 2 jobs (gone 2 or 3 nights per week)	Communication Extended family support
Family 7	Married 17 Son (16) Elite swimmer Daughter (14) recreational swimmer Daughter (9) recreational swimmer	Medical motivation for enrolling in recreational sport. Son developed quickly and entered elite level swimming at 14	Housed under single swim club (recreational/elite) Multiple coaches	Length of meet Cost	Recreational and elite swim practice and meets at some facility	Cost Time commitment required of swimming	Communication Siblings support one another at meets Children complete homework at pool freeing up time at home

### **Family 1**

Family 1 was composed of four members, a mother and father who had been married for 16 years, and two boys ages 13 and 12. The 13-year old had been playing select baseball for 3 years and had been playing sports since he was 4. The oldest son practiced three times a week with games and tournaments on weekends. His younger brother was not as involved in sports, but played recreational lacrosse for a city league. The lacrosse team practiced one day per week and had games on Saturday.

The family was classified as high SES, earning over \$200,000 annually. The father worked as a restaurant owner, and had several franchises located throughout the large, metropolitan city in which they lived. The father had a flexible schedule that allowed him to assist with transportation as needed. Despite his flexible schedule, the husband did travel out of state four or five times a year for business. During these stints the mother relied on carpools and assistance from neighbors to facilitate her children's activities. The mother is a stay at home mother and maintained the house and coordinated the children's activities. This allowed her ample time to schedule, plan and prepare for the various activities her family was involved in. She was always able to drive one child to his activity, but counted on her husband's flexible schedule and carpools in cases in which their schedules overlapped.

## McMaster Results

	Cut-off*	Family	Father	Mother	Son (13)	Son (12)
Problem Solving	2.2	2.2	*2.4	1.6	*2.4	2.2
Communication	2.2	1.9	*2.3	1.7	1.5	2.2
Roles	2.3	1.9	1.6	2.1	2.1	1.9
Affective Responsiveness	2.2	1.8	2.2	1	1.5	*2.5
Affective Involvement	2.1	1.6	1	1.1	1.9	*2.4
Behavior Control	1.9	1.6	1.2	1.3	1.7	*2
General Functioning	2.0	1.6	1.7	1	1.6	2

Table 2: Family 1 McMaster Family Assessment Device scores

\*Scores greater than the cut-off are considered unhealthy and scores below the cut-off are considered healthy

This family as an averaged whole scored high on the McMaster Family Assessment Device (Epstein et al., 1983). A score of one represents a family with very high family functioning and a score of four indicates a family with poor family functioning. An overall functioning score of 1.56 indicates that all four members of this family are aware of general rules and roles within the family, and that they have good communication. The family's lowest score (2.15) was for problem solving, but according to the cut-offs established by Miller et al., (1985), this is still within a healthy range. In addition, this family scored below 2 on the communication, affective responsiveness, roles, affective involvement, behavior control, and general functioning sections of the McMaster test.

According to the individual member's scores, the younger brother reported ratings within the problem range in both affective responsiveness (2.5) and affective involvement (2.4). This indicated that he did not feel there is equal treatment of family member interests and that he did not feel the family responds with the appropriate emotions to different situations. His communication score (2.2) was right at the cut-off, suggesting he

felt the family was not communicating as effectively as they are able. The mother reported the healthiest problem solving score (1.6), indicating that she felt the family was able to deal with problems that arose. The mother and father had a discrepancy in how they perceived the family to be functioning; the father perceived more problems with problem solving, communication, and affective responsiveness compared with the mother, whereas the mother perceived greater difficulty with role allocation in the family. Taken together the McMaster results suggest a relatively well-functioning family with some areas of stress that are perceived or experienced most strongly by the father and youngest son.

### **Sport History**

Prior to their son's enrollment in select sport, he participated in recreational sport since the age of 4. In the early years of sport participation, both the mom and the dad played a role as a coach for their son. "One year [my wife] coached and then I coached. So it was a lot of fun. I had never played soccer before at that point, so I didn't know the rules...I love learning new things," said the father. As their son progressed in skill, the role of coach shifted to that of a spectator. "I was probably kind of at my limit in terms of being able to add value to the kids... I think it's transitioned even more now that we've gone to a professional coach where we're paying a coach, where I'm not even out there on gameday, I'm just sitting on the bleachers," he added. Despite the change in roles the father still found the same level of enjoyment in watching his oldest son compete. While both parents served in some capacity as a coach for their older child, they did not volunteer coach for their youngest child. He played recreational soccer like his brother, but was never as involved or interested in sport. Upon entering middle

school, motivated by peer influence, he began to play recreational lacrosse, which was his current sport at the time of this study.

With the shift from recreational to select sport for the oldest son, the family saw an increase in the demands for participating and a shift in focus on what their child benefited from participating. When reflecting on the early recreational years, the mom said, “[I]t was very social, a lot of fun seeing other mothers, working with the kids...[Now] there is a social aspect to being on a team, but for [my son] it’s mostly because[his] passion is baseball.” She added, “It was positive. It was a lot of fun. I remember sometimes afterwards we’d go for ice cream. Oh, I remember the parties at the end, when they are at that age, 4 and 5, were a big thing...But, you know, it’s their time.” With the select team the focus was on the performance with little emphasis placed on team social functions. After games the family headed home to prepare for the next day, but the mother organized social functions with some of the families, but there were not official team functions that included all families.

The team on which the select athlete participated was independent, in that there was no league that oversaw and managed multiple teams. Team organization and scheduling was facilitated by groups of parents and coaches that created their own team. The coach that headed this family’s team was selected through a series of interviews with the parents of the athletes. In addition to training the players, the coach was responsible for scheduling games with other teams and enrolling the team in tournaments. While this gives the parents say in the coach and allowed for a good match in values between the parents and the coach, with the lack of a league structure, the team’s schedule was sporadic and often taxing on the family.



The cost for participation for this team was \$1,200 per year for registration and coach fees, but additional costs including equipment, travel, clinics and tournament fees occurred throughout the year. The younger sibling's recreational lacrosse team had a league fee of \$250 per season with the additional cost of equipment.

### **Sport Challenges**

The primary demands from the sport league that appeared to impact this family most strongly were communication and time. Despite hidden costs in the form of optional clinics and private lessons, the family, given the financial resources it had, was not strongly impacted.

Communication issues were directly related to the coach that the team hired. With no league overseeing the team, the coach was the only outlet in which parents could voice their concerns. Often times the coach made decisions based on his development as a coach with little regard or understanding of the demands of the families. There were multiple occasions in which the coach would make a last second schedule change that was in his best interest, but not necessarily better for the families involved. The mother said "[T]he coach is not a good communicator. . . . [W]hen we first joined on with him he would change the practices. I'd say, 'Are you joking with me? [My son] is not my only child! Baseball is not my only thing. . . . You can't do that to me. So that was hard initially.'" A lack of communication with the team may leave the family feeling disconnected or less engaged with the team. If the parents felt that their feedback was not being listened to, they would likely get frustrated with the team.

Despite having a say in his hiring, there were also some issues of trust that arose from this team. One such issue that impacted this family was a sense of loyalty. The

family felt the coach did not reciprocate their loyalty to the team. In one case the parents felt that the coach put his personal interests ahead of their son's. The son had suffered a horrendous injury and was having a hard time fielding the ball when he recovered. The family thought that the coach would do what he could to help their son, but the coach was focused on winning. She said, "He told [my son], 'Unless you stop being afraid of the ball, you're off the team.' I'm like, 'Are you joking me, dude? Really? Take a look at everything you stand for.' I said, 'OK, if you are going to play that game, I will play that game with you. I'll pay for you to give him private lessons and make him not afraid of the ball.' He goes, 'OK.' So he took my money." This lack of trust may lead to the family feeling dissatisfied with the team and through spillover impact family functioning.

The time demands from participation included travel to and from games and a practice schedule that involved additional clinics. There was a great deal of pressure to adhere to the schedule regardless of last minute changes. In comparing the select sport to recreational sport, the mother said, "I think the expectations change. They expect your son to perform at all times. Whereas daddy coach it's fine! I expect the 'daddy coach' to do good for my son, whereas the paid coach expects my son to perform. It's kind of switched." In order for the athletes to meet the coach's expectations, practice occurred three days a week with optional clinics offered one or two days. In addition, there was a greater expectation to attend every practice. Not only was the family paying a professional coach, but also there was an increased expectation from the coach for all of the athletes to attend. Practice, with the clinic, occurred four days a week with a 30 to 45 minute commute depending on traffic. The boys got off of the school bus at 4:00pm and had to be ready to leave by 4:30. "Practice generally started at 5:30pm...So 5:30-8:00

they have practice...Then they'd come home, eat dinner, homework, shower, to bed, get up the next day," said Mom. The father said, "So it's a good two hours just drive time, plus you're out there for a couple of hours." The large amount of time demanded of the league impacted the family in multiple ways. Families have a finite amount of time and when one activity commands an unequal amount of time, family members may feel neglected. It also creates a situation where the family is making trade-offs. By utilizing their time to facilitate participation in this baseball club, the family was prioritizing this activity over other family activities. If members of the family do not feel that this was fair, it is likely to have a negative impact on them and in turn impact family functioning.

Another challenge was the inconsistency of tournament play throughout the year. As opposed to league or recreational play, this team scheduled tournaments when they were available. "They'd play one tournament this month, then two or three the next, then play one tournament, two or three the next. It's like, 'Come on!'" said Dad. When talking about the game days, the select participant said, "I wake up at like 6:30am and get dressed. If it's a big tournament, [the last game could be] really late, like 9:00pm...And then on Sunday, if it's a good day on Saturday, we have a late game. Bad day we have an early game." The inconsistent schedule created additional stress and required higher levels of coordination to accommodate games and practices. The mother was the only member of the family that was considered at a healthy level in problem solving. Issues like this are likely to impact her ability to perform her role in the family.

### **League Support**

One positive aspect of the team with regard to family functioning was the input that the parents had on selecting a coach. All of the parents of the athletes took part in

the interview process of the coach and were able to ensure that he was a good fit for their children. It also helped ensure that the athletes and families involved had shared values and common goals. “I liked [our coach] for a lot of reasons,” the mother said. “I had heard about him and got [my son] where he needed to be so he could be on that team...He’s a Christian man. He teaches the boys about baseball, but he also taught them how to be good people.” In addition to having a coach with similar values, the parents had more of a direct input regarding scheduling and other functional duties that a governing league would normally arrange.

Although there were initial challenges with the practice and communication, the mother was able to directly talk to the coach about how the scheduling of practices was occurring. When talking about how he used to spring up practices at a moment’s notice she added, “He kind of calmed down.” Also in attempt to provide more flexibility in scheduling, the coach had just recently purchased his own facility. “[H]e’s bought his own facility,” said the mother. “I mean these kids practice twice outside and once inside and we rented a facility. But now he’s bought his own facility. So that will be good for the boys.”

While there were initial challenges with the coach, the family ultimately felt that they share similar values with him and he had taken their interests to heart. If the family felt satisfied with the coach of their son and felt that their concerns are being heard, then positive spillover may occur, impacting functioning positively.

### **Family Challenges**

One of the challenges that faced this family was an overlap in activity schedules. The youngest son played in a recreational lacrosse league with a three- month schedule.

During this time, the practice schedules overlapped one day per week and during games on Saturday. The father's flexible schedule enabled him to help out most of the time, but he also traveled on a somewhat regular basis leaving the mother the sole person in charge of transporting the boys to their activities. This placed additional strain on the mother and forced the role of instrumental support almost primarily in her hands. This may create a situation that family roles are perceived to be unfair and one in which this additional stress from the time demands of the family activities negatively impacts functioning.

All of the family members, with the exception of the youngest child, felt that there was enough time to spend as a family outside of sport. The youngest son stated multiple times in the interview that he wished they had more time to engage in other activities together. This was further reflected in his McMaster score on affective involvement (2.4). The youngest son made it clear that he did not enjoy going to his brother's games, so he often remained home alone during games. On the rare event that he was in attendance at the games, he said, "I usually sit in a chair with my parents in the stands...I play on my iPad." The majority of the recreational time that the younger sibling spent outside of school and sport was removed from his family. This may also lead to a situation where a member does not agree with his or her role, and may negatively impact functioning. This could also negatively impact the older son, as Cote (1999) noted that the siblings play a role in supporting elite athletes.

The marital dyad's cohesion was also negatively impacted through the time and scheduling demands of sport. When asked about typical communication between husband and wife, the father said, "Baseball, lacrosse, getting kid from point A to point B; that

sort of stuff...’What are you doing? Where are you going? When are you going to be here?’ You know, typical kind of coordination type stuff.” The couple only had limited time to spend with one another, and spent a large portion of that time planning out their children’s sports schedules, arranging rides and things to that nature. This may further impact the marital dyad given the different levels of communicating the husband and wife were engaged at. This is perceived as problematic for the couple because it is dominating their daily lives. The marital dyad is at the top of the family hierarchy and its influence permeates throughout the family system (Broderick, 1995).

### **Family Support**

Given the demands that participating in this baseball league had placed on this family, their functioning had been impacted. The family utilized multiple means to mitigate some of the effects, but family function was still impacted through the relationship with the team.

All four family members described themselves as close and they mentioned a variety of activities they do as a family outside of sport. In some aspects sport has allowed them to spend time together as a family and get closer through interactions with other families. “I think we’re definitely very social because of sports,” said the mother. “All sports, whether it’s the lacrosse that we do or the baseball that we do...But it’s made me more inclined to socialize and have a lot of people over.” Through the children participating in sport, they gained an interest in attending sport and have used that as a means to spend time together. “I think we’re at a lot of sporting events between both the kids and enjoying professional sports as well,” said the father. “I think it has a positive impact because through sports you can learn a lot of life lessons.”

What mitigated the demands of your sport on the family were flexibility and the mother's problem solving ability. The mother worked as a stay at home mom and coordinated all of the family member's schedules effectively. The father's job also granted him flexibility in his schedule if his assistance was needed. "Thankfully, being in the restaurant business, being the owner, I've got a pretty flexible schedule. There are times I'm on a phone call when I'm out there at the baseball field, so I'm still working sometimes." How this flexibility has aided the family is that on days in which the baseball player had multiple games and his little brother is staying home alone, a parent was able to make a trip back home to check in with him between games and one can remain out at the fields. It also allowed them time to transport the non-participant to his recreational activities when there was a schedule conflict. So, while the scheduling demands appeared to be placing the largest amount of strain on family functioning, the flexibility that they were able to utilize mitigates the negative impact on the family.

During the interviews, all four family members noted the high levels of communication they had with one another. This was also reflected through observations during the interviews and in most of their McMaster scores. The father was the only family member that was on the unhealthy side of the cutoff on his McMaster score. Utilizing high levels of communication the family was able to navigate the difficulties of coordinating everyone's schedules. Both parents noted that the majority of their conversations centered on instrumental support and that they had very open communication with both children. "I ask my boys a lot of questions," said the mother. "I tell them what I am doing and sometimes they think I ask too many questions, but that is my job." The wants and needs for all members of the family were known and all

members felt that they had a fair voice in family affairs. Having open and fair communication among all members, this family was able to alleviate some of the stress of participating in select sports.

### **Summary**

Family 1 was functioning at a high level. They had high levels of communication and cohesion and have been able to create stronger family bonds through sport. The parent-child relationships had been enhanced through sport, being able to share in triumphs and work together to overcome difficulties. This may have enhanced the cohesion of the family and enable higher levels of functioning.

With the exception of the mother, all three family members are either at the cut-off or on the unhealthy side of problem solving. This might place additional strain on her in her role coordinating everyone's activities. The added difficulties surrounding the coordination of a father who traveled, and two children with unique activities, coupled with the lack of strong problem solving, had required additional time of the marital dyad that could have otherwise been used differently. The younger sibling also voiced some concerns about spending more time together as a family. The time demands of the select baseball league have had a clear impact on the family, limiting their extracurricular activities outside of sport and adding stress to the family system.

### **Family 2**

Family 2 was composed of five members, a mother and father who had been married for 15 years, two daughters (13 and 11) and one son (9). The 11-year old had been playing select soccer for three years and had been playing sports since the age of three. On her most recent team, she practiced two nights per week and had games and



tournaments on weekends. Both other children played recreational sports, with the 9-year old playing recreational football. During the season, the son had practice one night per week with games on Saturday. The oldest daughter's extracurricular activity was the cello. She practiced at home and at school, with performances throughout the year on Saturdays. After trying multiple sports in her youth, she decided to quit sporting activities in middle school and focus on the cello.

The family was classified as high SES, earning over \$200,000 annually. The father was a software engineer and the mother, who did not work outside the home, was in charge of family coordination. The father did not travel for his job, but did have a rigid work schedule. The rigidity of his schedule and his unavailability for transportation between 8:00am and 6:00 pm, placed additional emphasis on the mother's role for coordinating all three children's activities.

### McMaster Results

	Cut-off*	Family	Father	Mother	Daughter (13)
Problem Solving	2.2	1.4	1.4	1	1.8
Communication	2.2	1.6	1.7	1.2	1.8
Roles	2.3	1.5	1.5	1.4	1.8
Affective Responsiveness	2.2	1.9	1.8	1.7	2.2
Affective Involvement	2.1	1.5	1.6	1	2
Behavior Control	1.9	1.9	1.8	1.6	*2.4
General Functioning	2.0	1.6	1.8	1	*2.1

Table 3: Family 2 McMaster Family Assessment Device scores

\*Scores greater than the cut-off are considered unhealthy and scores below the cut-off are considered healthy

This family averaged a general functioning score of 1.6 on the McMaster FAD. The family members that were able to complete the McMaster FAD perceived the family was communicating on a healthy level and considered their family to be close. The

family's least healthy score was on behavior control (1.9), which is the cut-off point between healthy and unhealthy functioning (Miller et al., 1985).

The only scores that were on the unhealthy side of the cutoff were the 13-year old daughter's scores for behavior control (2.4) and general functioning (2.1) (Miller et al., 1985). This suggests that she perceived the rules for the family were not fair and that overall her family was not as healthy as she desired. The mother also reported drastically different scores on affective involvement and general functioning compared to her husband and oldest daughter. This suggests that she perceived things within the family more favorable than her husband or daughter. The two younger children did not fill out the McMaster FAD as the instrument is only valid for individuals ages 12 and up. Collectively the McMaster results indicate a family with moderately healthy functioning with some areas in dysfunction perceived or experienced by the oldest daughter.

### **Sport History**

When the children reached second grade they were allowed to choose one activity in which to participate. They were limited to one each because "I can only get so many kids to so many places when you've got three," said the mother. The middle daughter, the one playing select soccer, played recreationally until the age of 8 when she moved to a select league for greater competition level. Her most recent season ran from August through April with tryouts occurring in the summer. The oldest daughter most recently participated in horseback riding, but gave that up at age 11 to focus on playing the cello. Their son played recreational soccer early on and moved to swimming in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, but recently switched to recreational football. The recreational football league maintained a fall schedule.

In addition to their individual sports, the children were all currently training for a triathlon with their father and go geocaching with him four or five times a year.

Geocaching is an activity in which you use a global positioning system (GPS) to track down treasures that are hidden in wooded or urban areas. It usually involves navigating through a wooded area or a forest to a designated spot that one learns about from the individual who is hosting the event.

Prior to the children entering grade school, sports were a method of filling the day with activities. “Because I was a stay-at-home mother, I could take them to their activities within the confines of our day. It was a pleasant way for me to see other moms and the kids got to see their friends,” said the mother. “It was nice from a variety of perspectives.”

The scheduling began to be a difficulty once the children began school. “From a perspective of scheduling, I would say, because that’s the big deal that changed,” said the mother. “Now they’ve got a long school day, whereas back then they did not. So it was easy to fit in back then. Now, it’s not so easy.”

The father started out coaching the children in their second year of soccer. He coached each one of his children in soccer and coached one year of baseball for his son. “I enjoyed being a coach,” said the father. “I realize there is some pressure, but it’s not a stage in life where parents are that bad about winning. So actually, it was kind of a lot of fun to be a coach of them. Now it’s more just attending and helping out with little things. I think it’s nice to be able to sit and watch and enjoy the game.”

On a typical game day for either child that participates in sport the entire family tried to attend. “Usually the family comes,” said the father. “Although, these days our

oldest daughter, if the game is not too far away, we are comfortable letting her stay home by herself.” The oldest daughter added, “Most of the time I’m not able to because I have a lot of other things going on. I mean I do try to go when I can.” She noted that she would sit with her family and cheer on the team. She stayed home if she needed to practice her cello or do homework. The son attended all of the games unless he had a football game. He typically did not pay attention to the game or have any desire to be there.

With the overlapping schedules that often occurred with practice or games, the mother relied on frequent carpools. “Last year [our football and soccer schedules] overlapped,” said the mother. “I didn’t know what in the world I was going to do. Once I got it worked out with carpools and friends and got the carpools threaded together it was a blessing.”

The select athlete played for a team that was housed under a club along with many other teams. This club had teams of varying skill levels for different ages. Coaches were employed by the club and had a draft each season to set their team. The cost per season was \$1,300 with an additional \$300 for equipment and varying travel costs for tournaments. Practice and tournament schedules were provided at the start of the season, but the parents had no say in practice times or dates. The son’s football league cost \$200 per season with an additional \$50 in equipment. There were no tryouts or drafts and teams were coached by volunteer parents. The team played at a local facility in town that was about 15-20 minutes from the family’s house.

## **Sport Challenges**

In the season prior to this study, the parents felt that they were not getting a qualified coach considering the total cost of the league. “Our daughter who plays select soccer now has shin splints as a consequence of improper stretching,” said the mother. “When you put your child in a league like that, you expect that they are taking care of the physical well-being of the child. The coach did not ensure that the girls were stretching properly before and after practice.” The father added, “I was a little bit disappointed by the level of the coach. I think they could have been better in preparing the teams. They were just unprepared for certain aspects of the game.” Given the structure of the league, the parents did not have any voice in who their coach would be, or any means to interview potential coaches before trying out. This created a feeling of frustration between the league and the family system. Situations that create conflict outside of the family system, often lead to spillover, negatively impacting family functioning.

There was also a difference in values between the coach and the family. “In terms of talking to the players, I thought the coach could have been more balanced,” said the father. “You need to give the girls more encouragement.” The soccer participant agreed saying, “She had this motto. It was like ‘We win and lose as a team.’ So if someone did something wrong, we all had to do pushups or sit-ups, or the punishment, which got a little annoying because there were a few people that just kept misbehaving.” Her general feeling for her coach was that she got the job done, but was stern. It is likely that if both the parents and the athlete felt the coach was too stern, they could harbor negative feelings that could be brought back into the family system. Prior research also indicates

that coaches that are not supportive tend to have athletes who are less engaged (Fraser-Thomas et al., 2008).

Another challenge that impacted the family is communication. One desire that the father had was a feedback loop for the coach. “I was not involved in any feedback on any coach,” said the father. “Once you get a professional coach, I think there should be some feedback because those leagues are not cheap. It would be good to have a feedback loop there for the parents to tell people if they like the coaches.” “We had absolutely no say in the coach,” said the mother. “You knew who it was before you paid your money, so you could walk away, but you were assigned a coach and team and could only say yes or no.” With a lack of proper communication, it is likely that the parental dyad could become frustrated. This frustration may manifest itself in a way that transfers from the sport system to the family system. With the mother and father at the top of the family hierarchy, it is likely that this would negatively impact family functioning (Broderick, 1995).

Another challenge that faced the family was a disagreement with the league fees. The parents did not feel that the league was charging a fair price. They were able to meet the costs of the league, including equipment and travel, but did not think that the cost was appropriate. “There’s a bit of money involved,” said the mother. “It’s expensive, but I guess they pay for the coaches.” The father was more outraged with the price. “I was really shocked at the price when I first looked at it,” he added. “First of all, being from France, I was not used to seeing people spend that much money on sports. So to me it seems excessive. I mean it’s nice having all of the matching gear and being part of a team, but it’s a little bit overboard. I know there is some assistance to enable people who

don't have the means to join, but there are some people that probably don't participate because they just can't afford it. I think that's too bad." They still enroll their daughter in the league (despite the cost) in order to facilitate the skill development of their daughter. "She tells me she wants to be a professional soccer player and wants to be as good as she can in the sport," said her father. They felt because it was something that she wanted to do and was in line with her goals they were willing to pay the cost even if they did not agree with it. This can hurt the relationship the family system had with the sport system, and may lead to a situation where the family is not engaged with the sport system.

Scheduling was the final sport challenge that was impacting the family. They attempted to attend each other's activities as a family, but often had to split up when schedules overlapped. During the week, the mother was instrumental in transporting the children to their activities when the father was working. "My wife does a lot of the practice these days because they are during the week," said the father. "She also has a system of carpools with her friends. . . . I used to be involved with practice when I was a coach, but now no so much." The mother agreed, adding, "We utilize carpooling and just trying to interweave their activities so I can get them where they need to be." This level of coordination depleted the family of its time resources and placed additional strain on the mother. This created a trade-off for the family where they choose sport at the cost of other activities.

The soccer participant practiced two times a week after school from 4:30pm until 6:00pm. She arrived home from school at 3:00pm, had a snack and did some homework. When they utilized the carpool, the mother only had a 10-minute drive to get the soccer

participant to a designated location. She would then return to that spot at 6:30pm to pick her up and take her home. She drove the carpool every third practice, and left around 3:45pm to get to the meet-up location. She then stayed for practice and returned home around 6:45pm. The siblings did not attend practice.

The oldest daughter has cello practice through the school and is still able to take the bus home. She also practices at home and has no conflict with the soccer schedule. The son has practice one night a week during football season, and the father is able to facilitate transportation. This family is efficient in coordinating all members' activities, but because of their busy schedule are not often home together as a family during the week.

### **League Support**

One aspect of the league that helped the family with the challenges that were presented by participation in select sport was a consistent schedule. The club had to schedule their practice and game fields for multiple teams and, therefore, created a set schedule prior to the start of the season. This practice schedule remained consistent throughout the playing season. "Thankfully this upcoming season she has the earlier practice time so we are still going to be ok," said the mother. By maintaining a consistent schedule, the family was able to plan for the season ahead of time. They did this by arranging necessary carpools in instances of overlapping schedules. This reduced some of the time spent on coordinating and reduced the stress level for the mother.

The other form of support that was facilitated through the league was carpools. The league was regionally based, allowing for teams to have multiple children from the same part of town. This allowed the mother to avoid driving 30 minutes to practice,



staying at practice and driving back home twice a week. “I have to drive once every two weeks which isn’t too bad,” she said. On other nights she has a 10-minute drive to a central location to meet up with the carpool. Having the luxury to make arrangements for transportation, the mother was able to greatly reduce the amount of time she spent driving her children to and from their activities.

### **Family Challenges**

One of the greatest challenges for this family was the difficulty of coordinating three different children’s activities. The soccer participant had a set practice schedule two nights per week. The mother utilized a carpool and only had to drive every third practice. The father drove the son for his weekly practice, which varied during the season based on family needs. The cellist practiced through the school and at home, requiring little to no transportation. Saturdays often became a problem, as the likelihood of two or more activities was present. The cellist had two cello performances per month that typically took place on Saturday mornings. Soccer tournaments and club games took place on Saturdays and Sundays, often requiring her presence at a field from 7:00am until 6:00pm. The son’s football games were on Saturday afternoons during the season. “For games on Saturdays, we all go if we can, but if there is a football game or cello performance we just divide and conquer if we need to,” said the mother. The oldest sister added, “Most of the time we don’t have time to do other things because I’m always in a concert or my brother or sister have a game. It’d be fun if we had more time together.” When reflecting on the impact sport is having on the family the father said, “The one thing about sports is it definitely takes a lot of time for practices and stuff. Obviously, from a parenting perspective, it limits the amount of free time you have

because you are attending games and stuff like this.” This strain limited the amount of time they were able to spend together, which may negatively impact cohesion and functioning.

### **Family Support**

All family members described themselves as close, and tried to create time to spend together outside of sport when possible. The family had healthy scores in both affective responsiveness and affective involvement. No child expressed any resentment about attending another one’s activities and understood when only one parent could attend theirs. “It is nice if my brother and sister can attend my concert, but I’m not disappointed if they are not able to come,” said the oldest daughter. The family also participated in other activities together outside of organized sport. “I think we do a really good job staying connected,” said the mother. “My husband goes geo-caching with the kids and we really do make an effort to have family dinner as much as we can. We also spend our weekend free time together and our evening free time together. So, we’re together a lot by design.” The concerted efforts that this family made to spend together likely led to the high level of cohesion in the family. This has allowed their relationships to remain strong even when they spend increased time apart.

One of the key elements that kept this family functioning and enabled them to participate in a variety of activities was the work the mom put in as a stay at home mom. Utilizing her problem solving skills, she was able to coordinate all of the schedules, provide instrumental support and maintain the house. “If I were working outside the home, it would not work,” said the mother. “We would absolutely not be able to do this. I just can’t see with three kids how we would make this work.” The family was also

flexible in who attends what functions on the weekends. Sometimes they all were able to attend one of the children's activities and other times they had to split up to get everyone to their activity. This gave the children more choices when selecting their activity of choice, understanding that they had the ability to split up to get to activities that may overlap in scheduling. This may lead to family members being more satisfied in their roles and allow participation in the select sport league to have a positive impact on the family.

The high level of transparency in the family's communication was one of its biggest strengths. Children understood clearly their ability to select what activity they want, and the limitations in selecting said activity. "When the kids hit first or second grade, we started them to make their own choices," said the mother. "We would tell them they can pick one sport activity and maybe one something else, because I can only get kids so many places when you've got three." Describing his level of communication with his children, the father said, "We generally have a pretty open conversation table. We talk about a lot of things, from school, sports and music. It's pretty open." The open communication and clear expectations that it allowed has helped this family mitigate some of the challenges with overlapping activities. It also gave the children a voice in making the sport and activity decisions, empowering them and enabling them to feel comfortable to express their opinions. This eliminated unnecessary stress when personal sacrifices are needed to facilitate someone else's activity. It also helped prevent any issues when only one parent is able to attend someone's activity.

## **Summary**

Family 2 was functioning at a high level. Their McMaster FAD scores in communication demonstrated they effectively used open and consistent lines of communication to ensure that all of the members had a say and were able to coordinate each other's activities. The consistent and planned out schedule of the select soccer league allowed the family to prepare and better select activities. They made time outside of sport to spend together and have used sport as a way to enhance cohesion.

The amount of time that was required to coordinate all of the family activities limited the amount of time for the marital dyad. They both expressed a desire to spend more time together. The family also made a series of trade-offs to accommodate the demanding schedule of the select soccer league. It consumed the largest amount of time in the family, restricting what other activities they would have been otherwise able to partake in.

## **Family 3**

Family three had two children, a 15-year old daughter who played select volleyball and a son (10) who played little league baseball and football. The husband and wife had been married for 18 years. The daughter has been playing volleyball since she began learning at her father's church when she was five. She has been playing club/select volleyball since the age of 10, and has spent the last four years with the same club. She practiced four days per week and had games and tournaments on weekends. The son was also active in sport, and had played baseball since he was five and had played football for the past two years. His baseball team was housed in a private club,

but no travel outside the local area is involved. Practice was two nights per week with games on Saturday.

This family was classified as low-SES, earning less than \$50,000 annually. The father was a student pastor and the mother was a teacher. The mother worked Monday through Friday, from 7:30am until 4:00pm. The husband worked various hours during the week for the church and helped out with the church service every Sunday. This left the burden of weekday practice on the father and the burden of Sunday games on the mother. The only time that they were able to attend games as a family was on Saturday.

### McMaster Results

	Cut-off*	Family	Father	Mother	Daughter (Athlete)
Problem Solving	2.2	1.2	1.3	1.1	1.2
Communication	2.2	1.7	2	1.3	1.6
Roles	2.3	2	1.8	1.9	2.2
Affective Responsiveness	2.2	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.6
Affective Involvement	2.1	*2.3	*2.2	1.9	*2.5
Behavior Control	1.9	1.2	1	1.2	1.3
General Functioning	2.0	1.3	1.4	1.2	1.3

Table 4: Family 3 McMaster Family Assessment Device scores

\*Scores greater than the cut-off are considered unhealthy and scores below the cut-off are considered healthy

This family as an averaged whole scored a 1.3 for general functioning on the McMaster FAD (Miller et al., 1985). The family averaged highly functioning scores in problem solving (1.2), communication (1.6), affective responsiveness (1.5), and behavior control (1.2). The family was considered unhealthy in affective involvement (2.3), indicating that, while the family functions high on a general level, there was some perceived confusion in how members showed an interest in one another (Miller et al., 1985).

The son was under 12 and did not fill out the McMaster FAD. The father (2.2) and daughter (2.5) reported unhealthy scores on affective involvement, indicating that they perceive that someone will only take interest in another's activities if it benefits them as well. The mother reported a very healthy score on problem solving (1.1) suggesting that she perceives that the family is able to handle problems in an effective manner. Taken together the McMaster results suggest a highly functioning family in general, with the most perceived issues within affective involvement.

### **Sport History**

In this family the oldest daughter was involved in a travel-based club volleyball team. She was initially interested in volleyball from playing with older girls at her father's church when she was five. Upon seeing a potential for her in volleyball and his daughter showing interest in the sport, the father decided to enroll her in a volleyball league at the YMCA. She participated there until she was ten and switched to a club-based team for higher levels of competition. "I can remember her taking to it really quick," said the father. "Not just because she was the coach's daughter, but she definitely was one of my best, if not the best, player on my team. Not only did we work at the YMCA, but I actually bought a volleyball net and we set it up in the backyard to work on her receiving, passing and serving. After a year at the YMCA, she was bored and wanted more competition, so we started looking for a club." The father was very involved early on, serving as a volunteer coach when she began at the YMCA. "My role in the beginning was to teach the fundamentals," said the father. "The YMCA gives you a lot of documentation to study, so I studied that. I got online and watched video on proper footwork, passing the ball, the ready position, all that. And then lo and behold, when she

moved to the club team it was the same fundamentals the club coaches were teaching. It's been hard for me to step away from being a coach, although I enjoy it a lot because I get to watch the game and am not as focused on the girls." Despite his shift to a spectator from a coach, he is still actively involved in training his daughter. "I do coach from the stands," he added. "Going from coach to spectator is hard at times, but I take a lot of pride in the fact to know that I had a piece in my daughter's training." Club/select practice was four nights per week and high school practice was everyday during the season. In addition to her practice at high school and the club, the daughter worked one-on-one with the father to work on specific skills. She said, "I want to play college volleyball. My plan is to get a college scholarship and my dream is to play in the Olympics someday." She played varsity volleyball at her public school from August through November and played on a club that ran December through July. The cost for the select team was a \$600 initiation fee and a \$325 monthly fee. Equipment was included in the \$600 initiation fee, but additional fees for tournaments and travel occurred throughout the year and there were optional private lessons available for \$35 an hour. Most tournaments took place locally, with about eight tournaments a year out of town, with two of those being out of state. The family estimated that travel costs were upwards of \$2,000 per year, and only one parent would travel out of state. At some of the tournaments that were closer, the family would try to attend, but typically just the daughter and one parent attended.

The son started playing t-ball when he was five, and switched to a non-travel based club at the age of seven. Like his sister, when he first started playing his father was the coach. "I started coaching his team and he took right to it," said the father. "We

actually stayed with the YMCA for a while, but when he got to kid pitch he got bored,” said the father. “Kids weren’t throwing accurately and he was bored out of his mind. We looked for a club and have bounced from team to team for the past few years.” The most recent club the son played for, at the time of this study, had a season that ran May through August, with games on Saturday and practice two times a week. Some tournaments extended into Sunday, but all games were played in town. The cost of this club was \$225 per month.

### **Sport Challenges**

One of the biggest challenges presented to this family from a sport perspective was financial. “Financially, sometimes, it’s a struggle,” said the father. “Sometimes we do without other things to meet the cost. I tell my daughter, and I don’t think she takes me serious, but I’ve wanted a 24-foot boat and I’m like, ‘I want you to know that instead of me getting my boat, I’m investing my money in you. Our travel, our plane tickets, fuel, upkeep of cars, food, lodging and extra training.’” The league was upfront with its prices, but certain tournaments, depending on how the girls played, added additional days of lodging and travel. “She played both weeks, but we’re hoping she doesn’t do that this year, because financially that about killed us, to be honest with you,” said the father. The mother added, “We easily spend at least \$8,000 per year just for volleyball.” As mentioned by the father, this created a situation in which the family is making trade-offs. They had given volleyball and baseball a higher priority than a boat and family vacations. This not only puts financial strain on the family, but it also places additional stress on the daughter as she overtly understood the family was making trade-offs for her benefit. Another challenge from the sport league was the lack of compatibility with the family



values. The family was very church based and liked to reserve Wednesdays and Sundays for church. The mom said, “There are quite a few games on Sunday so I am the one who takes her.” Given the father’s role with the church, he was unable to attend any games that took place before 2:00pm. “Personally I would love for them to consider our schedules, family schedules,” said the father. “I know they can’t do that when you’ve got 200 girls playing, but Wednesday night is an important night for us and she normally always gets stuck with a Wednesday night practice. She’s been stuck with a Wednesday night practice every year we’ve been with this club. When I was a kid playing sports, Wednesday nights were sacred and even high school coaches knew that. But here in the last decade, the respect for religious values in general has gone out the door because club sports are such a money maker that people feel the need to do that.” The daughter did not voice any concern with practicing Wednesday night, but had some concern for the cumulative time spent practicing. This conflict of values between the family and league is likely to cause tension between the two systems, and may lead to a situation in which the family is less engaged with the league.

The other value conflict was loyalty. This family described themselves as close and stated they place a lot of weight into the concept of loyalty. When they enrolled her in the league they assumed that clubs would show loyalty to girls who deserved it. “The one thing I don’t like about club is they don’t consider loyalty at all,” said the father. “That’s something I wish they would really look at, because there are a lot of club jumpers, as we call them, in the area that are not satisfied. For us, we’re in for one purpose, and that’s to train and to get as good as we can get before we take that next step.” From the daughter’s perspective it was not clear how the coach made decisions

and appeared to favor certain players over others. She said, “[Our coach] didn’t make good decisions and played favorites a lot. I didn’t understand why I wasn’t setting. I talked to her and ask her questions, but apparently she thought she was making the right decisions.” This type of discourse between systems may negatively impact the relationship between the league and the family. If that relationship is damaged, it is likely to impact the daughter’s experience in the league.

Coaches are assigned in this league, with no input from the parents. The mother said if she could change one thing about the league she would “have picked the coach for my daughter’s team. There would still be issues, but I would like to have some sort of say.” The coach is assigned to each team based on the selection process. This has led to issues of turnover and a lack of trust. “She’s never had the same coach in all the years she has played with this club,” said the father. “It’s been a different coach every year and we anticipate this year she’ll see a new coach. She has stayed with a lot of the same girls over the years, but the coaches have changed each year.” The daughter commented on her current coach and said, “Overall she was a good coach at the beginning, but to me, went downhill. She didn’t make good decisions and played favorites a lot.” When prompted about what the father would like to see in a coach he said, “My number one pet peeve is favoritism. The reason I say that is that just because you like the kid doesn’t mean the kid has the right talent to be in the position that they’re in. A lot of times on the club level, if the kid feels a bond with the coach, the coach is immediately attached to that kid emotionally and it will affect his judgment.” This also created tension between the parents and the league and the daughter and the league. These negative emotions are likely to spillover and impact family functioning. If additional family resources are

consumed on dealing with league related problems, it is likely to have an adverse impact on the family.

The final challenge from the sport was the time commitment. The daughter practiced four days a week with the club in a facility that was only 10 minutes away. Practice ran from 4:30 until 7:30, with the first hour designated for setters. The father was responsible for taking her to practice and stayed with her the duration of practice. When she arrived home they ate dinner as a family, she did homework and then she went to bed. The daughter said, "It seems like I have no time, not enough time, to do homework and sleep. I wish I had more free time." Even though the daughter had this concern, she remained willing to make the sacrifice to pursue her dream of competing for the U.S. Olympic team. She added, "On Facebook, my friends are like going to this, going to this, but I'm like, I don't have time. I have a tournament, so I can't. The little things I wish I could do." Tournaments took place on Saturdays and Sundays, with about three or four tournaments per month. "I'm not going to say club sports doesn't strain your family, because it does; time schedule-wise it takes a lot of time and dedication and we knew that going forward in this," said the father. "It's an investment." The time commitment for the non-travel based baseball club was only two days a week of practice and one or two tournaments per month. In cases of overlapping schedules, the parents alternated who attended the baseball games and who attended the volleyball games. The son voiced no concern or preference as to who attended his games and the parents relied on cell phone communication to keep each other updated on the other child's situation. This depletion of time resources is likely to have a negative impact on functioning. It often leaves members feeling drained and tired, and places additional strain on members

higher up in the hierarchy for them to coordinate and plan how they can meet the time demands.

### **League Support**

One way in which the league helped facilitate participation from the family is from shared values. While the family and the league did not share all of the same values, which may lead to some stress, they both shared the values as to what is to be gained through participation. “I want to play college volleyball,” said the daughter. “My plan is to get a college scholarship and my dream is to play in the Olympics someday.” When asked what he hopes for his daughter through participation in this league the father said, “She’s already gotten it. She’s very confident in herself. She’s proven to herself that she can do some things she didn’t think she could do.” This agreement in an end goal, skill development, helps the family deal with the negatives as long as it accomplishes this goal. The mother said, “[S]he has said she wants to go to the next level so we are investing in that as much as we can to give her all opportunity to achieve the goal that she wants to achieve at the next level, which will be the collegiate level.” This appeared to be the number one reason why the family was committed to this league. The final goal that both parties were seeking was shared. If the family perceived that the league was providing appropriate skill development and their daughter was progressing as they felt she should, they were likely to remain satisfied with the club despite a number of concerns. This should have positive spillover into the family system.

The other benefit of this league was that the practice facility was only 10 minutes from their house. With practice running four nights a week until 7:30pm, the family was able to sit down and eat a family dinner every night. With the conflicting schedules of

both parents and the children's sports activities, a short commute allowed the family to still spend time together during the week.

### **Family Challenges**

The family challenges that were present in this case are issues of cost, time, the marital dyad and favoritism. The family made sacrifices in order to meet the overall cost of participation. Due to the expensive nature of the club, the family no longer took vacations and has delayed some bigger purchases until the daughter is in college and out of the club. The financial burden has also created a situation where both parents worked in order to meet the financial needs of their family. The mother worked as a teacher five days a week and the father was a student pastor. He worked periodically throughout the week and on Sundays. "[My husband] is a youth pastor and I am a teacher," said the mother. "We are not on the get rich quick plan. It's definitely a sacrifice, but when your kids love it that much you do what you have to do." The family was willing to make these trade-offs in order to keep their children happy. If these trade-offs reach a point that begin to impact individual members of the family in a way they do not perceive fair, it is likely to have a negative impact on family functioning.

One of the larger challenges that faced this family is the overlapping schedule of family members. Both the son and daughter participated in sport activities and often their schedules overlapped. The family addressed this issue by splitting into groups and having one parent and one child at each activity. This happened with both games and practices. Typically the father remained with the volleyball athlete, but both parents spend one-on-one time with each child at his or her event. The other issue that cuts into their family time was the work schedules of the parents. The only free day that the

family had together was on Saturday. The family only has a finite amount of time in which to spend together. The issue this created is that often the family is forced to split up on Saturdays to accommodate the children's activities, so the family may not have been spending as much time together as they would have preferred. This may impact family cohesion, and explain why the family's affective involvement score (2.3) was on the unhealthy side of the cut-off (Miller et al., 1985).

The marital dyad indicated that they were unable to spend as much time together as they would prefer. With the increased time and money demands from their children participating in sport, they have had to make certain sacrifices. The mother was asked about how things were between her and her husband and she said, "I think it goes back to the sacrifice area. We, honestly, pretty much every night of the week are involved with sport or sporting events. I think it's something we neglect. Taking time for just the two of us." When asked about what subjects he and his wife talk about the father said, "Not a whole lot. We're talking about schedules. Who picks up who, who's taking who to whatever, what we have for the rest of the week. Kind of venting, I guess you'd say. " This is indicative of large difference between the communication scores of both the mother and father. When asked about time spent with his wife he said, "Me and my wife, we haven't done it in a while, but we used to play tennis before we had kids. Between our kids and my job, there's usually not a lot of time to spend together." If this family continues to make a trade-off of sport over the marital dyad, it is likely to have a negative impact on overall family functioning. If either the mother or father become frustrated over the lack of time spent with the other spouse, given their position in the family hierarchy, it is likely to negatively impact all other family members.

The final issue that was affecting this family was a perceived favoritism towards the daughter. The son was able to participate in the sports that he wanted to, but his opportunities were limited based on the needs of the daughter. “I will not let my son play for certain baseball teams due to their practice schedule,” said the father. “We tell him we want him to try everything, but we don’t want the two sports to overlap too much.” While the son did not go into detail about time spent outside of sport, through conversations with the mother and father it was apparent that the daughter got most of the attention from the father outside of school. He provided her additional training after school and drove her to practice most days. If the son begins to perceive inequity in his role in the family, it is likely to have an adverse relationship on him. This may create tension in the family and negatively impact family functioning.

### **Family Support**

In addition to describing themselves as a close family, this family was also close to extended family that lived nearby. The extended family support eased some of the tension from the difficult schedule. The mother’s parents often provided transportation to and from the daughter’s tournaments when the parents were unable too. They also assisted with financial matters and helped pay for some of the travel cost. In addition, they attended as many of the children’s games as possible providing additional emotional support. The closeness the family felt also allowed them to freely express their feelings to ensure that they had a voice in family affairs. The daughter said, “We understand each other really well. If someone is going through something we try and help them out.” If the family remained close, it is likely to mitigate some of the additional stress that

participation in the select volleyball league had on the family. It helped members remain comfortable in their roles, and be more willing to accept trade-offs related to sport.

The extended family provided some levels of flexibility, but this relies on its problem solving ability. The father's work schedule during the week was flexible enough to allow him to take the daughter to practice most days, but had firm commitments on Wednesday and Sunday. His schedule has allowed for low stress transportation during the week, but his schedule has limited his ability to help during the weekends. This placed strain on the mother to accommodate both the needs of her son and daughter. Fortunately, the extended family was able to compensate when necessary. Due to the rigidity in both parent's work schedules, the son had been limited as to what teams he was able to participate in. This limited flexibility was somewhat helpful in easing some of the league burden, but a higher level of flexibility would be preferred.

The family also utilized high levels of communication to ensure that all family members were aware of each other activities and needs. Despite the large difference in scores between the mother and father, all three members who completed the McMaster FAD reported healthy levels of communication. Beyond describing their communication as open, the father went a step further and said, "I encourage them both to learn as much as they can. We talk about what they learn and how to put that into motion." Through communicating effectively with all members of the family, the father learned of an issue with his son and his self-esteem. The father took this knowledge and worked with him on playing the drums. The son currently plays the drums in front of the church every Sunday and has found it to be a rewarding experience. High levels of communication like this are likely to help the family navigate the difficulties of participating in the



volleyball league, because everyone should have a clear voice in his or her needs and if they are being met.

### **Summary**

Family 3 was faced with challenges in regards to the financial and time demands of the league. These two issues have impacted family functioning on multiple levels. The marital dyad has not had as much time as preferred by both the husband and wife. In addition, the son has had his opportunities limited by the restrictive nature of the daughter's schedule. The cost of the league has required the family to make multiple trade-offs and required the salary of both working parents. The overall time demands have caused the daughter to feel exhausted and have reduced the amount of family time spent together.

This family utilized their closeness to extended family to aid in the instrumental support required of the volleyball league. By utilizing this resource, the family was able to ease some of the burden to keep the external stressors to the family system as low as they were able to. They also utilized open and honest communication to ensure that all family members felt their voice was heard and that the trade-offs they were making were fair.

### **Family 4**

Family 4 was made up of five members, a husband and wife who had been married for 19 years, a son who is eight and two daughters who are 15 and 16. Both daughters played select soccer and the son participated in recreational soccer and flag football. Sport practice took place three nights per week and all athletic contests were on Saturdays and Sundays. All three of the children started playing recreational soccer

around the age of 5, but only the two daughters pursued select sport. They have been involved in select soccer since they were eight.

With a combined income over \$110,000, this family was classified as high SES. The father was a senior technical writer and the mother was a letter carrier. The father worked non-traditional hours to help him to facilitate his daughters' sport participation and was often up as early as 1:00am in order to start his workday. The mother worked a varying schedule during the week and on weekends. She was able to attend most of the sporting events and often volunteers to run the concession stand. Two weeks prior to the interview the oldest daughter earned her drivers license and had driven herself to practice a couple of times, but the family was just beginning to allow that on a trial basis.

### McMaster Results

	Cut-off*	Family	Father	Mother	Daughter (16 - Athlete)	Daughter (15)
Problem Solving	2.2	2	2.2	1.6	2.1	2.1
Communication	2.2	2	2	1.5	2.2	2.2
Roles	2.3	2.3	2.3	2	2.3	2.3
Affective Responsiveness	2.2	2.2	2.1	1.9	2.1	2.3
Affective Involvement	2.1	2	1.9	1.7	2.1	2.1
Behavior Control	1.9	*2.1	1.8	1.8	*2.3	*2.2
General Functioning	2.0	2	1.9	1.7	*2.1	*2.1

Table 5: Family 4 McMaster Family Assessment Device scores

\*Scores greater than the cut-off are considered unhealthy and scores below the cut-off are considered healthy

This family averaged as a whole reported a score of 2 for general family functioning. This score is at the cut-off for healthy and unhealthy functioning, indicating that the family was functioning at neither a high level nor a level that would show any signs of dysfunction (Miller et al., 1985). Most of the family averages were near the cut-off point between healthy functioning and unhealthy functioning.

The son was younger than 12 and his results were not included in the McMaster FAD analysis. Both daughters reported unhealthy scores for behavior control and general functioning. This suggests that they perceived the family to be functioning at a lower level than their parents and did not feel that the family operated with fair rules. The mother's reported score on communication (1.5) was much lower than the other family members, suggesting that she perceives a higher level of communication within the family compared to the other members. Collectively this family's McMaster results indicate a family that is on the brink between healthy and unhealthy functioning, with the highest levels of stress perceived or experienced by the two daughters.

### **Sport History**

Neither parent has a strong sport background growing up, but both had active childhoods with low levels of organized sport involvement. For the parents, the initial motivation for enrolling their children in youth sport was to enhance their physical fitness and to facilitate meeting other families. In the case of both daughters, the initial decision to look into sporting opportunities was initiated by the girls. The girls only played recreational soccer, and switched to select sport at the age of eight. The oldest daughter's last recreational season was one of her father's best sporting memories. "She was fortunate enough to get on a team that ended up being really good and played well together," said the father. "[They] pretty much won all her games."

Since their enrollment in select soccer, the mother has shifted from a spectator to a highly involved team parent. She was volunteering as a travel coordinator, and helped arrange travel for the trainers (coaches) and other families. She also volunteered for club fundraisers and the concession stand at home tournaments and served as the team's

treasurer. She was not as involved in her son's baseball or flag football league because of her work schedule and the time spent volunteering with the select league. She also handled the transportation of all of the children to their weekly practice. The father, who worked during the week, took care of transportation for tournaments and weekend games.

The select league ran from August through June with annual fees of \$1,415 per child. In addition to league fees, there were annual equipment costs of \$200, tournament fees ranging from \$30 to \$90/per tournament and travel costs that exceeded \$1,000 per tournament. In the upcoming season the parents estimated that their daughters would travel out of town for five or six tournaments. The league that both daughters played for had a series of tryouts in which trainers draft teams based on age and skill. Each team had three or four trainers that handled the practice and the coaching on gameday. Only one trainer was present at both practices and games, but it was unknown which trainer the child would have which day.

In addition to select soccer, the oldest daughter was also a member of the varsity team at her high school. Both parents expressed that they preferred the high school team to the club team for a multitude of reasons. They felt that the high school selection process was fair, parents are better behaved and they much prefer the schedule associated with high school. "We just realized that we enjoy high school teams a lot better," said the mother. "The high school practices were after school and did not conflict as much." They remained loyal to the select league because the daughters both wanted to remain with the league and they felt that it led to better skill development. This confusion

between what league is best for their daughter may have led to some of the role issues as indicated by their McMaster FAD scores.

The son's sports leagues had shortened seasons of three months each, did not overlap in scheduling, and practiced one night per week. The cost for the football league was \$225 per season plus equipment and the baseball league was \$175 per season.

### **Sport Challenges**

One challenge presented to this family was a lack of cohesion among other parents involved in the select soccer program. The mother served as the treasurer, was on the booster board and coordinated volunteers. She felt that she was putting in more than her fair share of time while other parents made excuses. "At the most it is two or three hours a year to volunteer and sell t-shirts or check people in," said the mother. "That's the frustrating part. People are telling you their excuses or not showing up for shifts...Nobody volunteers to their children's games...Sometimes people just don't want to show up." In addition to contributing more to the club than other parents, this family felt that most of other parents gossip and yell too much. "The other parents are always yelling and think they know everything about soccer," said the father. "That is a child up there, so I always set up our chairs away from all of the other parents and for a while I had my younger son with us, and I just can't sit there because all the parents are gossipy and complainers and everything so I just stay away from them." This resentment that the family felt towards other parents has hindered their experience with the club and the parents did not engage in social activities with the other parents. This may negatively impact the level of engagement that the family feels with the soccer league. It also may restrict the social benefits the family system engaging with an external system.

Another challenge, related to the structure of the club, is the way trainers were scheduled and assigned. There are multiple trainers per age and skill level that run practice and coach at games. It is unknown to the family which trainer they will have at a given time. The parents felt that some trainers had a better bond and will play their daughters more and that some trainers, for political reasons, will not give them fair playing time. This impacts the family as a whole as both the parents and the daughters may bring negative feelings back into the family system. It also consumes time and energy from the family system in order to discuss and resolve the issue.

The other issue that has risen due to the trainers is what the parents describe as political issues. They perceive that the trainers may be influenced by the parents and treat the players differently. They also feel that the tryout system is flawed and lacks transparency. “The people that are there after the last tryout aren’t a trainer anymore,” said the mother. “They come to argue over these girls and it’s not necessarily that they have the skill, but they’re trying to get moved up [to an older age bracket] for a year. And people say she’s a better-fit skills then most of the girls her age...But there were other people, for whatever reason, just wanted the other girls, who weren’t as good or dedicated and that is the frustrating part.” The father added, “I wish I knew how they made their trooper decisions or how they say this person will be on this team and this person will not be on this team. I don’t think it’s necessarily the skill all the time. I think a lot of that is being who you are or how you present your kid...I just want it to be fair all along the process.” This again may impact the family system as family resources are exhausted as the family deals with this issue. Additional time is spent between members

on this and any negative feelings present due to this may be brought into the family system.

Once on the team the oldest daughter also didn't like the issues that arose due to non-soccer related items. When asked what she didn't like about one of her trainers she said, "She's real biased and kind of eccentric. She has favorites and she puts them in the positions they want to play. She doesn't yell at them...I don't know, I just don't like her." This type of environment may lead to a situation in which there is a lack of trust between the family and the league and possibly the family and the coach. This may create additional tension that could spillover from the sport system to the family system.

The cost of the league created some issues for the family. They were able to meet their financial obligations despite the cost, but they did not think that it is fair. The family felt that the league should be more accessible, so the mother increased her volunteer work to help out families that could not afford the cost. The league offered scholarships, but the mother did not think that it was enough because it only covers half of the trainers' fees. "When people ask for [financial assistance] we can maybe offset it with them doing some kind of fundraiser," said the mother. "There are some people who, for example, do the concession stands because they don't have the money. But they are working their rear ends off to be able to make sure that their daughter can play. You know I told my husband that if our girls weren't playing soccer right now I would be a sponsor." The mother has increased her volunteer load and taken on an additional time commitment to ensure that more people can play, despite their dislike of the cost. Any activity that requires a large financial commitment will drain financial resources from the family system. This creates a situation where the family is making trade-offs in order to

participate in the select soccer league. If these trade-offs reach a point that begin to negatively impact other family members, it will likely decrease the family's overall functioning.

The final sport challenge is the time commitment. This family, in addition to practice, games and tournaments, volunteered for the girls' club to help the club with various activities. The mother served multiple roles with the club and had described her role with the team as her second job. "I have a full-time job, and sometimes [my volunteer work] is all I do in my time off," said the mother. "My husband will be like, 'you should get paid for this.' I mean, I don't do it for that. I don't do it for the recognition or anything like that. I do it just because I want it to be a good experience for my kids." The practice schedule for the club was four days a week. Three of the four practices ran from 8:00pm to 9:30pm. The oldest daughter said on those nights she is not in bed until 11:30pm. For school she had to up at 6:00am and said that it was tough when she had a late practice.

The time commitment may be impacting this family in multiple ways. In addition to the weekly commitment it takes for practice and games, the mother utilized her free time volunteering with the club when that time could have been spent with the family. Also, the oldest daughter had practice three nights a week making it difficult for her to successfully navigate her school days. The unequal time commitment by the mother to her children's activities may also impact the son. While he did not specifically talk about how he felt about his mom spending so much time with the soccer league, it could potentially create a situation in which he feels that he is not getting enough attention. This could create tension in the family, negatively impacting family functioning. The time



demands may also be impacting the marital dyad, as the father has expressed concern that the mother is spending too much time volunteering for the select club.

### **League Support**

Some of the ways that the league created challenges for the family were also forms of support. The financial issues of the league did create a sense of unfairness in the family, but they did appreciate the opportunities to volunteer and off-set some of those costs. In addition, it gave the mother a sense of pride and accomplishment when she was able to assist those less fortunate in earning some money through the concession stand or another fundraiser so that they were able to afford to participate. They have also been able to earn enough money to put towards future seasons. “Last year, as a family sometimes we would have my son [at the concession stand], to work one shift per month,” said the mother. “During that last year, it’s fun, you know, working one maybe two a month. We were able to completely pay for all of her soccer fees and this year she went into the new season with over \$1,000 credit.” This type of assistance from the league, if taken advantage of, can greatly reduce the financial burden of participation. By having less of a financial burden placed on them from the league, the family should have fewer trade-offs and be able to spend that money elsewhere on the family. It should also reduce some of the stress associated with the league and should dampen the impact on functioning the demands of the league had.

Another way the league supported the family was with the shared goal of skill development. The oldest daughter wants to grow as a player and play at college in some capacity. The parents both want their daughters to grow as players and achieve their goals through sport. “I like the paid trainers,” said the mother. “Because I think that

some of the people who were coaches before didn't know anything about soccer." The league also contracts with outside recruiting service providers to assist the athletes in securing scholarships to play soccer at the college level. There is an additional cost involved, but for \$200 families are able to work with a company to put together flyers for the athletes and strategically target colleges they feel would be a good fit.

Through these two mechanisms the league is able to lift some of the burden the family has in pursuing their goals through soccer. The cost of the league goes down through volunteering and the club provides additional support to ensure the daughters are accomplishing their goals through soccer.

### **Family Challenges**

The family's schedule was one of their biggest challenges. The mother and father both worked full-time and all three children were involved in extracurricular activities. The father left for work at 1:00am and worked until early afternoon Monday through Friday. The mother worked 8:00am until 5:00pm Monday through Saturday, with one day off during the week. The father handled transportation to and from practice and Saturday games, and the mother assisted on Sundays. This busy schedule left little time for the family to spend with each other or with friends outside of sport. Both daughters have had to give up the annual homecoming dance and don't get to spend as much time with their friends as they would like. They mentioned some displeasure, but accepted it as part of participation. They felt that the trade-off was worth competing. The schedule has prevented the family from taking vacations together and the family was forced to split up most weekends to get everyone to their activities. To exacerbate the time demands of participation, the level of involvement of the mother claimed additional free time during

the week. This led to the husband harboring some resentment towards her. “I think sometimes she is a little too involved with [the team],” said the father. “Like the treasury aspect and all that stuff...She gets frustrated being so busy. She works on Saturday and then she will work on Sunday... She’d be a lot less stressed and everything if she didn’t try to do so much herself.” The mother also talked about her over involvement, equating it to an additional full-time job. The family’s McMaster FAD scores supported this notion and it may have impacted the perception of roles in the family. Summing up his sentiments of the family’s schedule, the son said, “We don’t have any time to do anything.” When asked what he wished they had time to do he said, “Just be together as a family.” While the other members of the family claimed they felt they had enough time to spend together, if even one family member feels this, it can escalate and negatively impact family functioning. The son may feel that he is not being treated fairly or that his needs are being ignored. This may cause him to resent both of his sisters and his parents. He is likely to be negatively impacted as an individual, which in turn might negatively impact family functioning.

Another challenge that the busy schedule has created is a lack of time for the marital dyad. The husband and wife were able to spend very little time together one-on-one. This can be problematic for the entire family as the marital dyad rests at the top of the hierarchy. They claimed to have made efforts to spend time together, but the mother said, “It’s hard, I mean, we’re making an effort for one day a week to do something. To be able to go and do just anything, but it’s hard. I mean, we are both exhausted at the end of the day...And then, you know, sometimes we don’t even talk... He’s either in the car, or he’s at a game or practice.” The husband also talked about how they made an effort

and spend some time together, saying, “We have time [together], it’s just all the activities we’ve got going it seems we’re running in different directions.” This type of trade-off, if not dealt with, may negatively impact the family.

There was a lack of upward communication from the two daughters to the parents. The mom found herself utilizing other parents and checking her daughters’ social media sites to oversee what her daughters are doing. When she felt the need to intervene, she said, “If she doesn’t tell me right ways, if I find out about it, I can ask her...She [isn’t] upset about it, she’s just growing up. Then she [will talk] to me about whatever it is.” This led to additional time and effort from the mother to manage her family and protect its members. It could also potentially impact cohesion, as the levels of trust between the mother and daughters might be harmed.

The final issue facing this family was a feeling of inequitable time for each individual’s activities. A hierarchy in activities was present, with the oldest daughter getting first priority, the younger daughter getting the next priority and the son getting the lowest priority. The son was currently involved with a recreational flag football team and a recreational baseball team, but was limited as to which league and which team based on their schedules. He had expressed a desire to be able to spend more time with his friends, but said his sister’s sport schedules limited his opportunities. The parents both stated that they felt bad that he is unable to freely choose what extracurricular activities he wants, but they have to maintain as good of a balance in their schedule as possible. This may lead to one family member feeling that his or her role is not as valued as others. Feelings like this can permeate the family system and lead to dysfunction. The parents, in their

family role, do need to make decisions like this and ensure that the other members are comfortable with it.

### **Family Support**

The five members of this family all consider themselves close to one another and was reflected in hearing them speak of one another. As indicated with their affective involvement McMaster FAD scores, the children all enjoyed spending time together as a family and liked attending each other's sport contests. This high level of cohesion has also led to an increased level of trust between the parents and the children. The mother described a situation where her daughter wanted to attend a party. The daughter was upfront in stating that there would be activities at the party that were in conflict with family values, but she would abstain. The mother trusted her daughter and allowed her to go because of the trust that the family has built over the years. This level of trust has also allowed the parents to let the oldest daughter drive herself to some practices. With her driving to some practices, the role and time demands of the father should decrease and help lower his stress level.

The mother had a somewhat flexible schedule, which allowed her to help the family deal with issues that sometime arise. When she needed to fill in for the father during the week to pick up a child from school or take someone to practice, she was able to temporarily leave her job to help out. She also worked close to home and was sometimes able to structure her lunch break to spend time with the husband when he returned home from work. The family had also been able to utilize extended family, which provided additional flexibility in their scheduling, to provide transportation for their children both during the week and on weekends. The flexibility of the mother's job

and the additional support from the extended family alleviated stress and allowed the son to participate in more activities that he otherwise would be able to. This flexibility helped ease the time demands that sport was placing on the family.

The communication scores on the McMaster FAD demonstrated that this family had discrepancy between the parents and children with the level of communication in the family. The mother and father perceived that they utilized their effective communication to coordinate schedules and attempt to secure time for the two of them to spend together. Through this they were able to try and maintain a strong marital dyad and ensure that the instrumental support that was necessary for their children to participate was met.

### **Summary**

Family 4 was functioning at an acceptable level. They were able to effectively communicate with one another most of the time, and were flexible enough to handle the scheduling demands of both parents work schedules and all three children's activities. They utilized extended family for help and had financial assistance from the mother's volunteer work with the soccer club.

Functioning may have been negatively impacted due to the trade-off of participation in the soccer league over time spent together as a family. The mother spent a large portion of her free time volunteering for the select soccer club, which may have negatively impacting the marital dyad. There was also unequal time spent on the children's activities. Without any changes, the son may harbor negative feelings and think it unfair the limitations placed on his schedule. He also expressed a desire to spend more time together as a family, which may hurt functioning if not properly dealt with.

## Family 5

Family 5 is composed of four members, a mother and father who have been married 13 years and two children, an 18-year old daughter and a 14-year old son. The 14-year old son and father are currently living in a city that is 200 miles away from their home in order for the son to attend an elite hockey academy. The daughter and mother still reside in their hometown where the daughter plays recreational hockey

The family was classified as high SES, with the combined incomes of both parents totaling \$100,000 per year. The father was able to move to the new city and maintain his full-time job as a food service executive and the mother worked as a midwife. The hockey academy served as both a school and an intensive training program for elite hockey players. The son attended school and practiced five days a week with games on the weekends. The daughter played in a recreational hockey league and drove herself to practice two times a week and had games about once a month.

### McMaster Results

	Cut-off*	Family	Father	Mother	Son (14) Athlete	Daughter (18)
Problem Solving	2.2	1.6	1.2	1.5	2	1.9
Communication	2.2	1.8	1.4	1.6	2	2.1
Roles	2.3	2	1.8	1.9	2.1	2.2
Affective Responsiveness	2.2	1.8	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.8
Affective Involvement	2.1	2	2.1	*2.2	1.8	1.7
Behavior Control	1.9	1.7	1.7	1.8	1.6	1.7
General Functioning	2.0	1.6	1.6	1.8	1.6	1.5

Table 6: Family 5 McMaster Family Assessment Device scores

\*Scores greater than the cut-off are considered unhealthy and scores below the cut-off are considered healthy

The McMaster FAD results showed this family averaged a general functioning score of 1.6, indicating that the family was functioning at a relatively high level. All of

the family averages were below the cut-off and indicates that this family was operating at healthy levels on all six aspects of the McMaster FAD (Miller et al., 1985).

The mother and father in this family had a strong agreement with most of their McMaster FAD scores, indicating they perceived issues similarly within their family. The only score that was within the unhealthy range was the mother's self-reported score for affective involvement (2.2). This suggests that she perceives that members only take an interest in other activities when they perceive a positive benefit for themselves. The family's McMaster results, when taken together, indicate a relatively well-functioning family with little perceived stress to the system.

### **Sport History**

Family 5 was a very active family with a rich sport history. Both the mother and father played sport regularly in their youth. The father played recreational soccer and played varsity football in high school. The mother was a swimmer in high school and up until a recent injury was a regular kickboxer. The family used to attend her bouts before she had to quit due to injury. Given their sporting background, the parents enrolled both children in the family in sport at the age of five. The motivation for enrolling their children in sport was to try and boost the self-esteem of the son and give him self-confidence and the decision to enroll the daughter was to provide her more opportunities to make friends. The son played t-ball and soccer early on and the daughter participated in dance and gymnastics. At the age of six the son switched to hockey and quickly took to it. "By the time next year came around, when he was seven, he was all for it," said the mother. "He wanted to be there, he wanted his gear, he wanted his jersey, everything."



After moving from the north to the southwest, the opportunities for hockey were not as prevalent. With this shift to a new state with fewer hockey leagues, the family had to drive 45 minutes to the closest rink. The family settled in a rural community outside of the nearest city to accommodate the mother's career. After the demands became too much on the family, they tried home schooling him at the age of 12, but it too was taxing on the family. After researching their options, they decided to have the father and son move 200 miles away to a bigger city that had an elite youth hockey academy. The academy provided all of the academic and sport needs for the family. "Fortunately my business is scattered all over [this state]," said the father. "I've got enough clients in [this city], just like I have clients [at home]. My employer was kind enough to actually pay for the apartment because I was able to show them that the travel expense that I had to travel here, stay in a hotel, four or five nights a month. The cost of that was actually more than the cost of renting me an apartment." The family may consider moving to the city that the academy resides in after the daughter graduates from high school, but it also depends on the mother's career.

The daughter switched to soccer in junior high and then, from watching her brother play hockey, picked up hockey in high school and plays recreationally just outside of the family's hometown. She had no desire to play at a higher level, but plans on participating in an adult league when she turns 18. She enjoys watching her brother play hockey and the two of them often play together when they have time.

### **Sport Challenges**

The challenges that this family faced from the hockey academy were its high cost and its distance from home. The cost for the hockey side of the academy is \$8,000 per

season plus equipment. Travel is not included in the cost and can be as much as \$10,000 per year. There is an additional cost of \$1,000 per academic year to cover the education expenses. Due to the costs the father said, “We have less disposable income. You know, so things like going out to eat with any regularity, you know. We’ve really curtailed that kind of stuff.” The family had to make the trade-off of having at least \$10,000 less disposable income in order to meet the needs of the academy. They did not specify exactly what was sacrificed, but this shows the level of priority that hockey had for the family.

The other challenge that the sport academy presented was the physical distance between family members. “It’s hard to be away from each other,” said the mother. “You know, my husband and I in particular, formed a really close relationship. That’s hard. Now we don’t want to be separated, but we are. And [my son] and I are really close too. And you know, I miss him, he misses me.” Both children viewed the distance as a sacrifice as they are close to one another, but attempted to make the most of their time together. As indicated by their affective involvement scores on the McMaster FAD, the family was not able to attend as many of each other’s events as preferred. The daughter said, “Oh yeah, I go to as many of his games as I can. But you know, he lives [out of town] so we don’t get to go too much.” The father and brother were able to attend a good number of the daughter’s games, as she did not play too frequently and games occur often when the father and son are home visiting. The physical distance between family members severely limited the amount of time they were able to spend together. Face-to-face communication was also heavily reduced. This has the strong potential to negatively impact cohesion and reduce the level of family functioning.

## League Support

One of the biggest benefits of the academy structure is that the vast majority of the instrumental support is built into its structure. The academy handled transportation for practice, scheduling, and the education of the athletes. The father's only role was to drive his son to the rink for games on the weekends. The rink was five minutes from the home and the schedule did not have any conflicts with his work schedule. "My role with the team really hasn't evolved much," said the father. "In fact, it's recently become sort of less, because of the academy... So, from that perspective, I guess my role is a little bit less. You know, but as far as my involvement with them directly, it's definitely more." The father expressed that since the move to the academy and the one-on-one attention he was able to provide, he felt that he was a member of the team and is highly engaged. The father felt that he was able to become more loyal to the team due to a decrease in stress.

Despite living 200 miles from home, the dad said:

It sounds crazy, but I think we are actually spending less time, you know, going back and forth, and travel, and all that. It's just you know, improved our home life. It's kind of weird though, saying that, because we're separated from the family most of the time, at this point. But, you know, when he was playing [at home] we would spend four hours literally getting him to and from practice, two to three times a week...[T]hen every weekend we would be traveling an hour to get to the rink, for games, and for practice. From that perspective, I think it's a lot better.

Even though the number of hours that his son practiced had increased ten-fold, the father said, "[T]he team provides a bus that picks him at school and takes him to practice. And, he's at practice from 2:00pm until 6:00pm. Our apartment is about five minutes away from the rink. So, I usually wrap up my work-day about 5:30pm, and then drive over and pick him up from the rink. We come home, and have dinner, and he does his homework. And, because of that, he has a lot more time, to focus on things that he needs

to focus on. Not spending so much time in the car is a big part of that.” The reduction of instrumental support that was previously provided by the family greatly decreased the amount of strain placed on the mother and father. This reduction in strain had freed up the father to spend his time removed from sport more focused on the family. This likely led to an increase in his satisfaction and on overall family functioning.

With its structure including the school, the family also felt that hockey did not detract from his education. The mother and father both felt that the academy provided their son with a great education and the son said, “I have a good education; I have a great education at school. You know, it’s a charter school; I’m not missing out on anything.” The mother added, “The education thing was great this year, because it’s all part of the same academy. Which I’m happy for him, I’m happy that he’s going to achieve well in school.” With the academy providing an education that pleases both parents and the son, the family is likely to form a positive relationship with this external system and see an increase in functioning.

Another form of support the academy offered was its shared goal with the family of skill development. This was accomplished through its structure and experienced coaches. By providing the schooling and transportation, the academy was able to maximize the athlete’s time on the rink. Practice typically took place on the weekdays, but there were occasional weekend practices. Prior to moving to the academy the son practiced an hour at a time for two days a week. At the academy he practiced four hours per day, five days a week, with two hours of on-ice practice and two hours of off-ice practice. When asked if he enjoyed practicing for 20 hours per week the son said, “I do. It’s been very tough lately, I’ve really been working very hard, but I have been dreaming

of this for years now. I like it.” The athlete and both parents were all in line with the goals set forth by the academy. When goals are in sync the level of engagement is likely to increase. Engaging in external systems that are perceived to have high levels of engagement may positively increase functioning in the family.

The other part of this support is having the appropriate coaches to provide the expert training. The mother said, “His current coach is fantastic. In fact, the entire league is really good. They were all professional hockey players, but they all have advanced training and are a little new to being a coach. They’re sort of athletes, playing with the team but coaching.” The father talked about how they learned about the academy through a network of coaches. The coaches of the academy were held in high regard and the son started to skate with them before he joined the team and took an instant liking to them. The shared set of values, the trust that the league is accomplishing its goals and the relationship the family has with the coaches has led to an experience that is almost void of stress. By providing such a positive experience, the family system may be positively impacted as overall stressors are decreased.

### **Family Challenges**

The main challenge that faced this family is the physical distance between members has severely reduced the time they spend together as a single unit. The family was not able to spend a lot of time together because of the son and father lived in a city 200 miles away to facilitate participation in an elite youth hockey academy. Family communication primarily took place over the telephone. While somewhat restricted in the vehicles for speaking with one another, it has also forced the family to rely on their high levels of communication as indicated on the McMaster FAD. The physical distance

also limited the amount of shared experiences that the family could otherwise have together. This is likely reflected in the scores close to unhealthy on affective involvement on the McMaster FAD. The mother said, “[My son] is home every other weekend or so. So, we see each other every other weekend. I might go up there, or he might come down here with my husband...So, we pretty much made a huge sacrifice in our lives, to help support his hockey career, because it seemed to really take off in the last year or two.” All four family members expressed a desire to spend more time together, but note that it is just a sacrifice that comes with participation in the academy. All four family members appeared to be willing to make the trade-off of less time together in order to facilitate the son’s participation in the academy.

### **Family Support**

This family seems to be functioning well in spite of their of their unconventional situation. They have worked to utilize the academy’s support structure to enhance their family functioning. Similar to the other families, all four members of family 5 described themselves as close to one another. With the stress reduced due to the academy providing most of the instrumental support, the family was able to focus on one another during the weekends all four members are in the same city, which occur approximately two times per month. The father said, “You know, I think all in all, when we’re as a family, we’re all actually closer now than we were a year ago. Because when we’re together, we’re really focused on being together...So, it, it’s kind of an unintended positive, or an unexpected positive.” The mother agreed, adding, “Lately when we’re together, we kind of concentrate our time on being together. We played board games and

we went to dinner on the East side last weekend...Right now we're concentrating on being together, a kind of all day event. You know, we do a lot together, as a family."

This increase in cohesion, due in part to a physical separation and a reduction in external stress has actually had a positive impact on the marital dyad. The mother said, "[My husband] made a comment recently that even throughout all this, our marriage is stronger than ever. And I [agree]. I don't know, it's like our lives have become more streamlined. Instead of always back and forth, and, you know, here and there, and driving [an hour to the rink], driving to [this city] and [that city], all these different places for hockey games every weekend..[I]t's pretty streamlined now." Commenting on how the league handles the instrumental support, the father added, "You know, it's relieved a lot of stress in our relationship. Just in regards of, who's getting him to practice today? And who's going to be able to take him to his game on the weekend? [M]y job does require me to travel with some frequency, and that burden would be thrust upon her...And, so, maybe it did create a lot of stress, and that's gone."

With the league taking care of a lot of small details, in terms of transportation, scheduling and education, the family saw increased levels of cohesion with the marital dyad forming the strongest bond. By ensuring a strong marital dyad, given its place at the top of the hierarchy, it seems that participating in this academy has increased this family's overall functioning.

The family had relied greatly on the flexibility of the father's job. If the father did not have a job that allowed him to live in a company paid apartment and live in the same city as the academy, participation with the academy would be highly unlikely. The mother's schedule, as a midwife, did not allow her a greater degree of flexibility and

hindered her flexibility, depending on her client load. At the point of this study, they were able to see each other about every other weekend, but the father commented that sometimes when she is on call they are limited in how far they can travel from their clients.

Given the physical distance between family members, this family utilized effective communication to ease the burden that was placed on the family. Even living over 200 miles away from her husband, the mother said, “[W]e talk every day, probably three or four times. And we say a lot too, so we’re pretty much caught up on our discussions. So, on the weekends, we are both pretty much on the same page.” The large amount of phone communication has helped the family deal with missing out on some shared experiences. When asked how to describe her family, the daughter said, “Well, we’re pretty close. We talk about a lot of stuff. We’re a very, very open family.” This level of communication has allowed them to overcome the burden of living in two different cities. Without having their communication flooded with the logistics that typically come along with participation in elite youth sport, this family has become closer than the other families in this study.

### **Summary**

Family 5 is the only family in the study that, because of sport, was living in two different cities. Their level of closeness was impacted and they have missed out on some shared experiences, but the league structure enabled them to focus on one another when they are in the same city. The family has also been faced with a large financial strain, spending upwards of \$30,000 per year on the academy.



With the flexibility that was presented to the father through his job and the high levels of long distance communication that the family utilized, they were able to enhance their cohesion and spend large amounts of quality time together. The reduction of instrumental support and shared values that the family had with the academy, allowed it to be a rewarding experience for all members of the family.

### **Family 6**

Family 6 had four members, a mother and father who had been married for 17 years and two daughters, ages nine and 14. The oldest daughter had been playing soccer since the age of three, and was currently playing select soccer. She practiced two or three nights per week and had games and tournaments on weekends. The younger daughter also started in soccer, but was currently playing recreational softball that practiced one night a week with games on Saturday.

The family was considered low SES, with both parents earning a combined income of \$60,000. The father worked full-time as a tax enforcement officer and had a part-time night-shift job and the mother worked full-time in an administrative position. The mother worked 9:00am to 5:00pm Monday through Friday, and the father worked primarily during the week until 6:00pm and worked weekend hours as needed. From time to time the father's weekend work schedule impacted his ability to help out with the families sporting activities, but the majority of the time he was able to help. The mother drove the girls to practice during the week and they either split up or attend both of their games on the weekend as a family. The family was able to attend more select soccer games as a family due to its extended schedule, but was able to attend two or three softball games per season as a family.

## McMaster Results

	Cut-off*	Family	Father	Mother	Daughter (14-Athlete)
Problem Solving	2.2	*2.4	*2.4	*2.3	*2.5
Communication	2.2	*2.3	2	*2.4	*2.3
Roles	2.3	*2.4	2.3	*2.4	*2.5
Affective Responsiveness	2.2	1.5	1.5	1.3	1.6
Affective Involvement	2.1	1.1	1.1	1	1.2
Behavior Control	1.9	1.2	1.1	1.3	1.2
General Functioning	2.0	1.6	1.6	1.4	1.8

Table 7: Family 6 McMaster Family Assessment Device scores

\*Scores greater than the cut-off are considered unhealthy and scores below the cut-off are considered healthy

Family 6's self-reported scores averaged a 1.6 in general functioning on the McMaster FAD. This family was functioning at a level that indicates there was an awareness of family rules, an emotionally stable environment and a generally healthy environment. The scores in which the family fared the poorest were problem solving (2.4), roles, (2.4) and communication (2.3). This suggests the family had issues navigating problems that arose, individuals did not perceive their roles to be fair within the family and that the level of communication was not as open as needed. The family averages that indicated the healthiest functioning areas were on affective responsiveness (1.5), affective involvement (1.1), and behavior control (1.2). This shows that the environment at home was emotionally supportive and that individuals perceived an environment where they were comfortable freely expressing their emotions to one another.

The individual scores of this family were all very close together, indicating that the family members all had similar perceptions to how the family was operating. The non-athlete sibling was too young to take the McMaster FAD. The father reported the

only healthy score for communication (2) indicating that he perceived more open lines of communication within the family compared to other members. All three members that completed the McMaster FAD reported unhealthy scores for problem solving.

Collectively the McMaster results for this family suggest a family that was functioning relatively well, with areas of stress in problem solving and communication.

### **Sport History**

Both parents in this family have a rich sports tradition. The father was an elite soccer player in his youth and played at the Division I level in college. The mother was a high school athlete, playing varsity basketball and was also involved in recreational kickball. The father is not currently participating in any organized sport, but the mother participates in a recreational softball league. Her league has multiple seasons per year, and competes in both games and tournaments on weekends. Her team was currently practicing on Wednesday nights, but it was open to change to meet the needs of the team.

When the oldest daughter was three, the parents decided to enroll her in soccer at the YMCA. The motivation to enroll her was to find an activity to direct her energy towards. The experience was positive for the family as the mother said, “It was a lot of fun. We had a very nice recreational team that we played with, got along with all the parents and enjoyed it. It was very recreational. It was just for fun.” She participated with the YMCA through the age of 10 when the league went from co-ed to separate boy and girl teams. At the age of 11, in an attempt to increase the skill level of her teammates and competitors, she made the move to a select league and has played for three different select teams. There was a feeling of unfairness and gossip that was a part of the first two clubs she played for. The parents also felt that the level of competition was not on the

level they wanted for their daughter. “[T]hat was part of the reason she changed clubs,” said the mother. “The team she played on when we first moved to select, I think the club was more focused on the bottom line of money than developing skills... Well, they ended up having 40 people try out. They should’ve dropped the last ten, you know, the bottom ten people and created two teams. But instead, they formed three teams and just kind of let anybody else that wanted to join be on that bottom team so they can have that last team. It seemed like just for the money.” They are satisfied with their current club and hope that it will help their oldest daughter make the high school soccer team. This supports their initial goal of skill development as one of the motivators of enrolling her in select sport.

The younger daughter played recreational soccer for just a couple of seasons, but then became disinterested and wasn’t playing sports for a few years. When she was six, her parents established a rule that each child must participate in at least one sport. The children were allowed to decide what sport, and the youngest daughter chose softball. At the time of this study she was in her fourth year as a catcher for a recreational team. Her team’s season ran from May to August with practice occurring one night a week. Her father attended most of her games and her mother and sister attended when the soccer schedule did not conflict.

### **Sport Challenges**

As mentioned earlier, one of the challenges that this family faced in select sport was a lack of shared goals and trust. The family wanted their oldest daughter to develop as a soccer player and the parents felt that sometimes the club was after financial gain. “[T]here were a lot of functions that they tried to promote within the club,” said the

mother. “That’s just trying to get more money. It had nothing to do with playing the game. It was nothing to promote the club or the sport, it’s just about making money and we’re not doing that...Fundraisers that just went for the club when we’re already paying fees and dues and all this other stuff. So it was very confusing because it seems like we weren’t told all of that up front.” This frustration led the family to switch clubs twice and added additional stress to the parents. They felt the motivation towards money affected the quality of team the league was putting together. The father said, “The team had some decent players, but then it dropped off because they couldn’t get enough of the good players to play. The competition was at a higher level and they were getting beat like 8-0. I don’t think they scored a goal all year. It’s hard to play and learn if you don’t have a team that can’t help you.” This conflict of values between systems may lead to dysfunction in the family. If the parental dyad is consuming a large amount of resources addressing the needs of an external system they are not pleased with, it is likely to negatively impact the family. If the daughter also felt that the league was not in her best interest, she is less likely to be engaged with the league and may have negative consequences.

The financial cost of the league was also a challenge for this family. The league was \$1,800 per year, including coaching fees, tournament fees, practice fees, uniforms and \$200 for the individual team account. The cost of transportation, food, and lodging for tournaments was not included and the family estimated they spend around \$400 per tournament. In order to keep costs down, the mother and father alternate who traveled with the oldest daughter to a tournament. “Some people say ‘Well, hotel costs the same whether it’s one person or four people,’” said the mother. “Yeah, but when you’ve got to

feed four people, then your expenses go way up.” They have also stayed at friends’ houses to save money, but don’t feel comfortable asking if all four can stay as opposed to two. The mother added, “Last year they had one [out of town tournament], and because of financial reasons we couldn’t afford for all of us to go and stay in a hotel, so my husband just took her and they actually stayed with a friend.” The cost of the league caused the family to make a number of trade-offs, including the oldest daughter having to wear a hand-me-down dress to homecoming. The daughter was somewhat disappointed, but said that she understood why. She said that she would rather remain in her league and make the trade-off of the hand-me-down dress. The father worked a second job to help out financially, but both parents indicated that it was for general help, not just for soccer. The father added, “There are certain things you can’t do because of the cost and because every weekend she’s tied up. It makes it hard to visit relatives or take vacation.” Both children mentioned a desire to take more family vacations and youngest daughter expressed an interest to even see more movies as a family. If the trade-offs continue to grow to a point that a family member disagrees with them, it may have a negative impact on family functioning.

Coordinating other scheduled around the select league had also become an issue for this family. They tried to attend games as a family, but there were occasional conflicts, including the mother’s softball tournaments and the younger daughter’s softball games. The time demands for participation had taken a toll on the oldest daughter. She said:

Last year I did a lot of theatre arts, and I was in plays and stuff. This year I’m not able to do that because soccer is taking over so much of my time. Then there’s times when I have to go to practice, so I can’t go to football games at the school. Or if my friends wanted to hang out during the

weekend I can't do that with them because I have to go to my games. I almost feel disconnected from the rest of everything, because people that don't do any extracurricular stuff, they do all this fun stuff. You have a mental breakdown sometimes. You get home from school, go to practice, do homework, and that's your whole day. You get so tired, and sometimes you wish you had time to do other stuff.

She said that she talked to her mother about this, but neither parent seemed to be aware of the levels of exhaustion that the daughter was feeling. If the daughter continued to feel exhausted, then spillover into the family and into other external systems is likely. The exhaustion that she felt from her sport league may negatively impact her relationships within the family and may negatively impact her ability to keep up with schoolwork. If that happened then the spillover from the league would be impacting her family system and her school system.

The oldest daughter practiced either two or three times a week depending on what division she was currently in. For most of her select practices, the father was working so the mother and younger daughter attended. The youngest daughter expressed a wish to spend more time together as a family and said that she "hates" attending practice and soccer games. She said, "It makes me angry." Both parents knew that she preferred not to attend either games or practices, but felt that she was too young to leave unattended at home. They made efforts at carpooling to prevent her from attending practice, but felt the family should attend the games together when possible. When one member of the family does not feel that things are equitable, it may affect the relationships between members and impact functioning. If a disproportionate amount of time was spent coordinating three different work schedules and three different sport schedules, it may also add additional stress and impact functioning.

## League Support

The current league that the oldest daughter was enrolled in shared common goals with the family. Both parents and the oldest daughter wanted a league that would provide her with appropriate level competition to ensure appropriate playing time and skill development. The mother said, “[W]e were told many times through the junior high process [that coaches look at select experience], and she had always said she wanted to play soccer in high school.” This is also facilitated through quality coaching. “My past two coaches that I’ve had, I really liked them because they have ways of making practice fun, and I actually enjoy it,” said the oldest daughter. The mother added, “As far as skill and getting out there with the girls, what I’ve seen so far has been good. He’s much more vocal than the previous coach she had on the field during the games, which to me is good.” When family systems are functioning at a high level, they are selective about engaging with external systems that are a good fit. This league appeared to be a good fit with the goals and values of the family and may prove beneficial to family functioning.

Another form of league support came in the form of a quality social network. The parents were able to build social relationships with other families. With the family’s often conflicting schedule, other parents helped out with transportation. “[D]epending on what time my [softball] games are, one of the players on her team lives on the other side of us,” said the mother. “We live between them and the field so a lot of time they will pick her up and take her to practice and bring her home. So that’s really nice, especially because now daddy doesn’t have to take [our youngest daughter] out there.” Parents have also told the mother they would take her daughter home so she can get the younger daughter home in time for her regular bedtime. This additional help with instrumental



support eased some of the burden on the family system, appeased the desire of the youngest daughter to attend unwanted events, and should reduce stress and improve functioning.

### **Family Challenges**

One of the challenges that faced this family was the perception of unfairness by the youngest daughter. The parents felt that she was too young to be left home alone so she attended practice weekly, and her sister's games against her will. The mother said, "The last year or two it's become more difficult to say. 'Your sister has soccer practice. We've got to go.' And there's always this, 'Do I have to go?' You know, so in that sense, the last couple years with [my youngest daughter] has been a little more of her just not wanting to take out of her time to sit and watch her sister for an hour and a half out in the heat." Throughout the interview, the youngest daughter made it clear that she does not like attending either practice or games. If she continued to bring up this need and the family was not able to meet it, the youngest daughter may perceive her role not equitable and may be adversely affected. Not only does this impact the youngest daughter, but it also permeates to the older daughter. The oldest daughter mentioned that she would like her sister there if she wanted to support her, but she said, "I think she gets really bored and doesn't watch. My other teammates have little sisters that she can play with sometimes who are out there, but most of the time she just gets really bored, and I don't think she actually wants to be there." Cote (1999) suggested that siblings play a role in the level of engagement the athlete has with his or her league. In this case, it appears that the oldest daughter is being negatively impacted by the lack of perceived support from the youngest daughter.

The marital dyad appeared to be negatively impacted because of the time demands of participation. The conversations were dominated by their children and coordinating schedules. The mother said that her and her husband talk about, “The kids, mostly, and scheduling. Quite honestly, he’ll come home from work and we have dinner, and it tends to be, ‘Is their homework done? How was the test? What happened at school? What happened with this? OK, what’s the schedule for tomorrow? Who is going where with who at what time and when?’” When asked about what him and his wife were able to do together, the father said, “Not a whole lot with all of the different directions they are going. Between the two of us? Maybe one night a week. We just sit and watch TV.”

The conflicting schedules also provided a challenge for this family. The father worked two jobs, including some nights and the mother works full-time. In addition to the work schedules, the oldest daughter had practice two or three nights per week and the youngest daughter had practice one. The mother stated that she perceived the biggest impact on her family has been scheduling. The family unit has a finite amount of time each week. If the family was spending too much time on scheduling and coordinating all of the member’s activities, it will impact their ability to spend time together outside of sport. This may negatively impact cohesion, affective involvement and affective responsiveness.

### **Family Support**

All four family members described themselves as close to one another and the three individual McMaster FAD scores indicated high levels of affective responsiveness and affective involvement. The mother said, “I think we’re pretty close. I try to keep a pretty open relationship with the girls. I’m not their friend; I’m still their mother.” The

mother mentioned a time when the oldest daughter wanted to attend a party. The daughter was upfront about how the family values conflicted with their family values, but assured her mother she would not partake in such activities. The mother put her faith in her daughter and allowed her to attend. They utilized high levels of trust to increase family cohesion. There was an understanding that if either of the children wanted to stop participating in their sport then they are free to do so. Increased levels of cohesion impact family functioning positively and may help the family deal with the increased stressors that participating in the select league has added.

This family relied on extended family to provide flexibility. They were close to the husband's parents, who live in town, and often turned to them for transportation and additional emotional support. The oldest daughter said, "I know my grandparents really like to watch me...I know one time we made it to the championships and they wanted to come and watch that, so they drove up just to watch the championships." Having the flexibility for instrumental and emotional support allowed the parents to pursue their own interests that would have otherwise been conflicting. The mother utilized this flexibility to participate in a softball league that allowed her to remain active and maintain time for her to spend with her peers. This flexibility helped support the individual members in their own endeavors, which flow to the entire family system.

Despite McMaster FAD scores that would indicate differently, both parents described the communication in the family as open. Both children expressed that they were comfortable talking to their parents about everything. The mother said, "Both my girls, I think, talk quite openly to their parents. I think we have a good relationship with them." Open communication in the family allowed for members to freely express

themselves to one another and facilitated the coordination that was required given the parents' work schedules and the family's sport schedules. The father spoke about how having his daughter participate in a sport he used to play bettered his communication with his daughter. He said, "It gives us stuff to talk about outside of the games. Keeps us both with something in common to talk about. I think its great. I think it helps tremendously." Utilizing communication effectively and openly had allowed this family to increase their cohesion, set clear and understandable rules, and mitigate the demands of the select soccer league.

### **Summary**

Family 6 was faced with a situation in which the financial demands for select sport were impacting all family members. They all admitted to making sacrifices to accommodate both the cost and the time demands of the club. It is apparent that the youngest daughter appeared unhappy being forced to attend her sister's practices and games. The majority of the family's time and energy was spent enabling the oldest daughter to participate in the select soccer club. If this continued, then the youngest daughter may reach a point that she is negatively impacted and her feelings impact the overall functioning of the family.

The family utilized high levels of communication and established trust among members to remain close. The family, minus the youngest daughter, appeared happy with the current league as felt that the soccer participant was developing and getting the level of coaching she required to be successful in high school and beyond. The family also utilized extended family and carpools to allow for additional time spent on individual activities outside of the select soccer league. Even with the father working

two jobs and both children enrolled in sport, the mother had time to work full-time and participate in a recreational softball league.

### Family 7

Family 7 was made up of five members, a mother and father who had been married for 17 years, two sons (16 and 9), and a daughter (14). The father was a finance manager and the mother was a substitute teacher. The oldest son was an elite swimmer at a local club and both the daughter and the youngest son swam recreationally for the same club. They typically practiced four nights a week at the same pool and swam in the same meets on Saturdays.

This family was considered high SES, as the combined income of the mother and father was over \$100,000. The father did not divulge his profession, but worked Monday through Friday from 8:00 am until 5:00 pm. The mother worked most days from 7:30 am until 2:45 pm as a substitute teacher. Both parents were off from work on weekends and the family attended church every Sunday.

### McMaster Results

	Cut-off*	Family	Father	Mother	Son (16-Athlete)	Daughter (14)
Problem Solving	2.2	*2.6	*2.5	*2.3	*2.7	*2.8
Communication	2.2	2	1.8	2.1	2	2.1
Roles	2.3	*2.6	2.2	*2.6	*2.8	*2.8
Affective Responsiveness	2.2	2	1.8	1.9	*2.3	1.9
Affective Involvement	2.1	*2.3	2	2.1	*2.3	*2.4
Behavior Control	1.9	1.2	1	1.1	1.3	1.3
General Functioning	2.0	1.9	1.7	1.9	2	1.9

Table 8: Family 7 McMaster Family Assessment Device scores

\*Scores greater than the cut-off are considered unhealthy and scores below the cut-off are considered healthy

This family's self-reported average on general functioning was 1.9. This indicates that the family members perceived that the family was operating in a healthy manner (Miller et al., 1985). The family's healthiest score was in behavior control (1.2), indicating that the rules in place were perceived to be fair and equitable. The family had scores that indicated issues in both problem solving (2.6) and roles (2.6).

All four members that completed the McMaster FAD scored in the unhealthy range for problem solving. These issues could reflect that there was a lack of clarity in the family roles or they were perceived to be unfair. The youngest son was under 12 and did not complete the McMaster FAD. Both the oldest son and daughter reported scores that indicated unhealthy roles, affective involvement and problem solving (Miller et al., 1985). This suggests that there was some confusion to what their responsibility was to the family, they did not perceive that people were interested in other's activities unless they had something to gain, and they had trouble dealing with problems that were presented to the family. Taken together the McMaster results suggest a family that is barely functioning at a healthy level with the highest levels of stress perceived or experienced by the oldest son and daughter.

### **Sport History**

The oldest son initially began swimming at the age of 18 months and began playing organized soccer at the age of five. When he turned seven he began to swim competitively at a local club. "As I got older I enjoyed swimming and I had asthma problems," the oldest son said. "The doctor said swimming was the best exercise to help with that. That is about the time I started swimming competitively. Since then I have just gotten better and love it more, so I have stuck with it." At the age of 12 he moved to

the elite group in his swim club and had been swimming at the elite level for the past four years. In addition he swam for the high school varsity team. His club practiced six days a week and traveled for tournaments six or seven times per year. For his school team he practiced on weekday mornings. His club team held practice Monday through Friday afternoon, and on Saturday mornings. During the overlap of his high school and club seasons, he would

The daughter swam for the same club, but not at the elite level. She had been with the club for the past six years. She had the same practice times as her older brother, but did not swim for the high school team. The youngest son had just started swimming with the club, practiced only two days per week, and did not participate in meets. He also played on a recreational basketball team. The season was six weeks long starting in November, with one game and one practice per week. The combined cost for league fees for all three children is \$4,500, not including additional meets, equipment or travel. When they factored in additional costs, the father estimated they spent about \$7,500 per year on swimming. Of the \$7,500 spent annually on swimming, \$4,000 was spent on the oldest son.

The father took the oldest son to practice in the morning and the mother drove the children from school to practice during the week. They tried to attend all of the meets as a family, but on occasion the youngest son had a basketball game in conflict. The youngest son did not swim competitively at meets. During his six-week basketball season, the father typically drove him to his basketball games if it was conflict with a meet. If the basketball game took place after the meet, the family would go from the meet to his game.

## **Sport Challenges**

One of the challenges that faced this family was the demanding practice schedule of swimming. The morning for the oldest child started at 5:00am when the dad drove him to seminary classes before morning practice. Upon completion of his seminary class, the son would attend practice with the high school team and then begin his school day at 8:00am. The older two children practiced six days per week along with their older brother for the club team. Practice was from 4:00pm until 7:30pm during the week, with morning practice on Saturdays. The mother was responsible for picking up the children from school and getting them to the pool. The mother said, “Because I sub, I go to different schools. Some are close to their school, some are not. It normally takes 15-20 minutes to get them. I pick up the younger kids first and drive another 15-20 minutes to pick up [my oldest son] and then I try and get them to practice by 4:00 pm.” The older children practiced first while the youngest did homework at the pool. When the older children finished their practice they did their homework while the youngest child practiced. The mother said, “It has impacted our family very much. I don’t know, most what we do is being in the pool and going to meets.” The swimming schedule, on occasion, created a conflict with the youngest son’s basketball schedule. When the two were in conflict, the family split up in order to facilitate everyone’s activities. While the ease of a central location had eased some of the burden placed on the mother, she still handled the additional stress of transporting the children to and from practice five days per week.

The family also expressed concerns about having virtually no voice in the club. The club was composed of multiple teams, multiple age groups, and took place at



multiple pools. There was a parent board made up of seven members whose job was to give the parents a voice in the club. The mother said:

Most of the teams we go to have a board of parents. It is very hard because sometimes, let's say you have 7 people on the board, but 100 parents that are not there and you just have those 7 parents deciding everything for the team. I would like more of a voice in what the club does. At least be heard in some way. In the [last] session they decided they didn't want a coach anymore. We are working with an elite group. Sometimes the parents on the board have young kids, swim at a different pool with different coaches and they have a say in the coaches in the older kids that they never see, they are never in contact with. They are making decisions without seeing things happening.

The son noted the importance of a coach in swimming, and the family felt betrayed by the club to have a coach dismissed from their club without any say. The mother expressed her concerns to the club, but the club backed the board's decision and encouraged the mother or father to join the board. This situation was almost the breaking point for the family, as they looked into hiring their old coach independently and building a team around him, but it was not feasible in terms of cost. Paying for his services and a facility proved to be too much. The family liked the new coach that was brought in, but not as much as the coach that was dismissed. In the near future, they family said that if communication with the league is lacking, it will negatively impact their engagement with the league.

### **League Support**

One of the ways that this club has eased some of the stress that may be present in other clubs is through its team organization. Teams were organized to encompass multiple ages and skill levels. This allowed the family to enroll all three of their children on the same team. All three of the children practiced at the same pool and had meets at the same pool. This eased the transportation burden that may have been present if the

children had activities in different parts of town. With a central location for practice and meets, the family was able to remain together most of the time. “The little one doesn’t swim in the meets, he is just learning competitive swimming, but the other two swim at the same time,” said the father. “Seventy-five percent of the time we are all there.” The ability to remain together as a family, participating in sport experiences together, may positively impact the family’s levels of cohesion, affective involvement and affective responsiveness. It granted them more shared family experiences and served as a means to bring the family together for a common cause.

Despite multiple coaching changes in their time with the club, the family felt that the club had, for the most part, provided coaches that shared similar goals and values. All five members of the family noted hard work is necessary to succeed in swimming. The mother said, “I think they have to learn, if they want something, they have to work hard for it. I think [swimming] is very good for that.” The oldest son added, “The practice, there is not a whole lot to love, because it just hurts a lot. But when you’re racing and you touch the wall, you are just filled with feelings of joy and accomplishment knowing that the hard work you put in paid off.” The coaches in their current club subscribed to these values. “If you have a coach that is hard and doesn’t smile, then you don’t smile and going into practice is that much harder,” said the oldest son. “Being positive and telling me ‘I told you could do that at the meet and I know you can do this in practice. I know it’s going to hurt, but I know you can do it and I believe in you.’ When they remind us of our goals, I really like that because they have in mind what is best for you and what you want to accomplish. They will do things personally to make you do better.” Coaches that the family has shared values with should make for a better

experience for both the children and the parents, which may lead to higher levels of family functioning.

The final form of support that this league provided was a group of peers of similar principles to the children. In describing his teammates, the oldest son said, “We’re family. We are super close. We hang out all the time and can talk to each other about everything.” The parents both expressed pleasure knowing that their children were hanging out with children they trusted and were happy their children were around good people when they were away from family. The oldest son added, “[W]hen I go to practice I am surrounded by people that care about me, who have high standards and are there for me.” Having such a safe system to engage in outside of the family enhances family functioning by allowing the children to feel a certain level of autonomy and the parents to feel comfortable with the external system that their children are members.

### **Family Challenges**

One of the challenges that faced this family was a lack of time to spend together. With school, seminary, swimming, and youth basketball, the family was not able to spend a lot of time together away from swimming. The father said, “I wish I had more time to spend time with them outside of swimming.” The mother talked about how they attempted to do things outside of sport, saying “[The children] have special nights out with a parent to go to a sporting event or something like that. Not very often, but they do.” The children all expressed a desire to spend more time together outside of swimming, but enjoyed the time they were able to spend together. If the swim schedule became more demanding as the children get older or the younger children swim at a

higher level, the amount of time the family is currently able to spend together outside of swimming may further decrease.

Time also created some issues for the marital dyad. Both parents worked, the children had an abundance of activities and the husband and wife were not able to spend as much time together as desired. “The time we spend together is when we are doing things with our kids,” said the mother. “We do things more as a family than a couple... Sometimes we do, just the two of us, but we usually bring the kids.” The father also commented on the lack of time with his wife, saying, “We try to carve out at least one night a week to go out for dinner, but it doesn’t always happen. Swimming can be very time consuming. I wish we had more time, but we try to carve some time out.”

### **Family Support**

All five members of the family described their relationships with one another as close and noted they enjoyed the time they spent together. The oldest son described the family as “super loving” and the mother and father noted that, despite not having as much time as they would prefer, they make the most of the time they have. The mother said, “Our dates are sitting there in the bleachers watching our kids or reading a book together in the stands.” The father added, “[W]e are both pretty focused with the same goals... This would be very difficult if we both weren’t dedicated.” The family also is strong in the Mormon faith, which enabled them to share similar principles and morals. This closeness helped reduce the stress that participating with the swim club may place on the family. None of the family members resented going to each other’s practices or meets. They also frequently turn to one another – to the family system - to help with any issues, either external or internal, that they faced.

The individual members' willingness to be flexible has aided this family in handling the stress that participation in the swim club may be placing on the family system. All three children have shown flexibility with their willingness enroll with the same club and attend one another's practice. None of the children expressed any hostility towards attending one another's practice or meets. The mother also had a somewhat flexible schedule, as she was a substitute teacher. She worked most days, but if something came up that she could plan for, she was able to take a day off. Despite having to spend time at the pool at their siblings' practices and meets, they made the best of their time and worked on homework. They also all spoke about enjoying supporting one another, but were above the cut-off on their affective involvement reports on the McMaster FAD (Miller, et al., 1985). The mother's flexibility allowed the family to deal with most problems that may arise. This allowed the family to mitigate the stressors that come with participation in an elite youth sport league.

Communication was one of the few McMaster FAD scores that showed the family was operating at a healthy level. They utilized open communication to ensure high levels of family functioning, even when faced with external stressors. Each individual family member mentioned that they talk about "everything" with one another and the mother said, "I really have an open conversation about everything with my kids. I really want them to feel comfortable to come to me with what's going on and how they feel and what they think about stuff." The family members indicated that conversations about sport do not dominate their conversations. The sister added, "My brother, I can talk to him about anything, any problems I have. My little brother, not as much, because he is a fourth

grader, but I will talk to him about things that are going on in his life, because I have gone through it.”

### **Summary**

The interview data for Family 7 and their McMaster FAD data painted two different pictures. Based on their discussion of the daily grind and their involvement with the swim club, it appears that they were not consciously aware of how involved they were with swimming. They portray that it had been overwhelmingly positive, but their McMaster FAD scores showed some signs of unhealthy family functioning that may be a result of swimming.

The burden of providing instrumental support for the children during the week had been placed solely on the mother. Despite a central training facility, her weekly schedule was full with her substitute teaching and her role transporting all three of her children to and from practice. The marital dyad had not been afforded as much time as desired, but the husband and wife attempted to enjoy time spent together regardless of the situation.

This family utilized a high level of communication and shared family values to remain close and functioning at an acceptable level. The swim club’s structure of a central training facility and a central pool for meets had reduced some of the stress associated with providing transportation for their children’s participation. It also enabled the family to attend all of the children’s sporting events as a family.

## Sport and Family Patterns Across Families

	Family 1	Family 2	Family 3	Family 4	Family 5	Family 6	Family 7
Length of marriage	16 years	15 years	18 years	19 years	13 years	17 years	17 years
Ages and number of children	Son (13) Son (12)	Daughter (13) Daughter (11) Son (9)	Daughter (15) Son (10)	Daughter (15) Daughter (13) Son (8)	Daughter (18) Son (14)	Daughter (14) Daughter (9)	Son (16) Daughter (14) Son (9)
Mother's Ethnicity	Hispanic	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian
Father's Ethnicity	Caucasian	French	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Columbian
Annual household income	Over \$200,000	Over \$200,000	Under \$50,000	\$110,000	\$100,000	\$60,000	Over \$100,000
Mother's highest level of education	College	College	College	College	Master's	College	College
Father's highest level of education	Master's	Master's	College	College	College	College	College
Mother's occupation	Stay at home mom	Stay at home mom	Teacher	Letter carrier	Midwife	Administrative assistant	Substitute teacher
Father's occupation	Restaurant owner	Software engineer	Student pastor	Senior technical writer	Food service executive	Tax enforcement officer	n/a

Table 9: Demographic background of families

### Composition, SES and Sport

There were some commonalities across the families in terms of how family and sport variables interacted to impact the family's functioning and experience with sport. In particular, there were notable patterns of family composition SES interacting with sport.

First, all of the families in this study had parents who were married for over 10 years. This was probably a source of strength in that the marriages seemed to be seasoned and relatively stable. However, children's participation in select sport placed tremendous strain on the marital dyad. Select sport consumed a lot of resources (e.g., money, time, emotional and physical energy), reducing the amount that could have otherwise been spent on the marital dyad. The mother in Family 1 said that her and her husband primarily spoke of, "What are you doing? Where are you going? When are you going to be here?" You know, typical kind of coordination type stuff." Speaking to what

her and her husband talked about, the mother of Family 6 said, “You know, sometimes we don’t even talk. He’s at the field picking them up at 10:00pm. When it rains, you know, we don’t spend a lot of time on soccer, but it’s hard. There are some weeks it feels they have practice after school five days a week and he is either in the car or at the field.” The father from Family 6, when asked about spending time with his wife, said, “Yeah, but that doesn’t come with having kids. You can make some time, but before they start driving, the only way she is going to get there is by you driving her.”

The family composition also had an impact on how the family system engaged with the sport system. The main difference in family composition came through number and ages of the children. Families with three children tended to be less involved in the league as a whole family, in terms of attending games and tournaments together. With conflicting activities from other children, parents and children often noted how they would split up to accomplish their tasks for the day. This seemed to have a negative impact on functioning, potentially impacting cohesion and reducing the amount of time spent together. Family 2 often split up on the weekends in order to accommodate the schedules of their children’s activities. The father said, “With three kids we have often overlapping activities.” The oldest daughter in Family 2 mentioned how she wished more people from her family could come to her concerts. Cote’s (1999) research highlighted the importance of sibling influence on sport development, but when families are splitting up to accommodate schedules, siblings are unable to be there supporting each other in their endeavor. The exception to this was family 7 who had all three children enrolled in the same club. The mother said, “It has impacted our family very much. I don’t know, most what we do is being in the pool and going to meets. We never



said our kids had to be involved, but once you are there for so long you might as well get in the water and get some exercise. Swimming is part of our family. It has been very positive.” Even in the rare case when only one child had a meet, other members made an attempt to go. The oldest son said, “Like yesterday, I went to her practice and then she went straight to a meet and watched her swim.” Their sport time was spent together as a family, potentially increasing their cohesion and functioning.

. Families with older children also seemed to be impacted more by participation in a select youth sport system. Families with children over 16 tended to be less involved in the club. Family 1 had two children, ages 13 and 12, and had a high level of involvement. This included aiding in the selection process of the coach, providing snack and towels to the athletes, and working with other parents to help paint a practice facility. The family with the highest level of involvement was Family 4. The mother in Family 4 volunteered as the league’s treasurer, volunteered at the concession stand and helped plan and organize tournament travel. It seems that when children get older and begin to look forward to playing beyond the select league, the involvement by individual members in the family decreases. As leagues begin to offer more services by paid professionals, family volunteers are not needed. The situation in Family 5 is the extreme version of this, with the hockey academy providing all of this support, including transportation. The family’s role has shifted all of its attention on emotional support and has shown increased levels of cohesion.

In this study, with a fairly homogenous sample, it didn’t appear that family composition and SES had much impact on functioning. Families that were lower SES had an increased number of trade-offs in regards to materialistic desires (Family 3’s lack of a

boat, Family 6's hand me down homecoming dress), but the families felt they were making the proper decision. The mother from Family 3 said, "We would definitely like to have a bigger house in a different neighborhood, but its something that we know is not feasible right now... It's definitely a sacrifice, but when your kids love it that much you do what you have to do." All families were functioning at relatively high levels and perceived to have a positive relationship with their sports league.

A family's SES also had some impact on how much time was free for coordinating and scheduling. The higher SES families, in which only one parent worked a full-time job outside of the home, had increased levels of flexibility and lower levels of stress. The mother from Family 2 said, "If I were working, it would not work. We would absolutely not be able to do this. I just can't see how with three kids how we would make it work." Both of the low SES families were families in which both parents were working. This further limited the amount of time the family had together and added an additional schedule to coordinate. The mother from Family 6 said, "When we have later practice, with [my youngest daughter] being still young she generally goes to bed at 9:00, but on Thursdays we're not even getting home until 9:30pm. Thursdays are a little bit tricky." The sibling in Family 6 is forced to stay up later than preferred because they don't have the flexibility for one parent to handle all of the transportation and one to stay home. When a family requires both parents to work, their level of flexibility may decrease and impact individuals in the family, and ultimately, functioning.

### **League Support and Challenges**

One situation that had a positive impact on family participation, and thus may have impacted family functioning positively, was parental input on coaching decisions.

Family 1 had direct input, in the form of interviewing potential candidates, on their child's head coach. This family noted that the coach and the family had shared values and had an overall positive relationship with the coach even in the face of adversity. It is likely that these positive feelings, both from the athlete and the parents, increased family functioning. Family 5 did not have direct input in their son's coach, but had the opportunity to meet him and were able to establish a sense of his values prior to enrollment. This enabled them to be sure that he shared similar values to the family and that he would be a good coach, not only for their son, but for the parents as well.

The families that were in club systems in which parents had no say in the coach or even the ability to interview a coach ahead of time noted some difficulties. Families often switched clubs or noted that the experience for their child was negative. Fraser-Thomas, et al. (2008) found that coaches that were supportive had athletes who were more engaged. If a family does not have say in the coach, they do not have the ability to select a coach that is a good fit with the family. This limits the family's ability to provide the 10 domains in which they play a role for its members (Poston, et al., 2003). Actively selecting a coach allows the family to fulfill the roles of advocacy and productivity. If a family is able to select a coach that has shared values and goals, like in Family 1 and Family 5, they can advocate for a specific coach that will provide appropriate development for their child. In cases in which the family has no voice in the coach, like in Family 4 in which the coach varied from practice to practice, there are likely to be feelings of resentment and a perceived lack of trust. Feelings like this, for both the athlete and the parents, will likely impact the individuals in the family system and lower functioning.

Another way that the clubs structured their leagues that impacted the family was through scheduling. When leagues were consistent with their scheduling, families were able to make necessary adjustments to provide appropriate instrumental support. This removes some of the stress present in the family system and also increases their problem solving ability. This should positively impact functioning. Family 7, despite living in separate cities, noted increased levels of cohesion and communication. The hockey academy demanded a large amount of time, but had a consistent schedule that was set and easier to plan for and manage. Family 1 noted that their team was sporadic with its scheduling, often giving short notice of a change, and that it became difficult to coordinate everyone's schedule. By changing schedules and not allowing any parental input into scheduling, the league may be negatively impacting family functioning.

League expectations also may impact family functioning. Most of the families in this study talked about a change in expectations when their elite athlete went from recreational sport to select sport. In addition to an increase in practice time and in events, there was a level of expectation that attendance was mandatory. With recreational leagues and even high school teams, families talked about how they could miss practice if something came up. When the children were enrolled on the select team, missing a practice was not an option. The mother from Family 1 commented on the expectations in select sport saying, "I think the expectations change. They expect your son to perform at all times. Whereas daddy coach it's fine! I expect the "daddy coach" to do good for my son, whereas the paid coach expects my son to perform. It's kind of switched." She commented that her coach offered optional clinics each week, but felt that there was an expectation for her son to attend these clinics. Reflecting on

recreational sport, the father from Family 4 talked about a great team his oldest daughter played for, “before politics and everything got involved like in select soccer or select sport.” The mother in Family 6 added, “Until last year [our oldest daughter] never missed a practice. I mean, at one point, she had broke her toe on the field. She played on it and it got infected. It ended with her being in the hospital for a week, but she didn’t miss any practice because they were rained out that week.” The ramifications included upsetting the coach, missing out on skill development opportunities or not getting playing time solely based on the fact that practice was missed. This additional pressure may cause families to reprioritize activities within their family and in some cases eliminate certain activities. The son in Family 2 was only allowed to select sports to participate in that were not in conflict with his sisters’ soccer. The parents in Family 2 were clear as to what priority was given to what sport. This could potentially have a negative impact on the son if he perceived this to be unfair, negatively impacting functioning.

The ways that league’s structure and inform parents of cost may impact the family unit. Families 3, 5, and 7 were all members of leagues that were upfront with the cost of their services and did not overburden families with additional clinics or extra services. In these instances, families still may think that the cost is too high, but are able to make informed decisions about enrolling. This allows them to appropriately plan for the cost of the league and may positively impact functioning. The other families were involved with leagues that offered additional clinics and provided additional services such as recruitment packages. In these leagues, families were not as able to plan for the costs associated and often felt pressure to partake in these services. The mother from Family 4 said, “And there are other fees that just come up for stuff. Like [for my oldest

daughter], they're like recruiting aides that we have to buy. “ She estimated it cost \$200 and noted that there was pressure to purchase the recruiting aid, from the league and peer pressure to get the same thing for her daughter that her teammates were getting. The mother from Family 1 noted, “The mother from Family spoke about the optional clinics that her son was expected to attend, noting, “[The coach] called it optional. [My son] would participate in one of them on Tuesday or Thursday for an hour and half. We paid extra for those.” Making decisions that are not fiscally sound or partaking in activities due to pressure may negatively impact the parents and the athlete. These negative feelings then impact family functioning.

One of the biggest ways that the leagues helped support families was through reducing the amount of instrumental support provided by the parents. Families 5 and 7 had unique situations that enabled the families to significantly reduce the amount of instrumental support they provided on their own. In the case of Family 5, the hockey academy handled almost all of the transportation. Transportation to and from practice was provided during the week and was included for some games. The father who was living near the academy with his son was able to attend some of his son’s practice with ease and did not have to worry about coordinating any logistics during the week. Leagues are faced with a trade-off of the amount of additional instrumental support they can offer and the cost of the league. If a league is going to offer more services, they are most likely going to incur a greater cost and pass that to the family. Leagues should seek out ways they can provide additional support without incurring additional cost. Multiple families in this study talked about how they required carpools to provide assistance in cases of scheduling difficulties. Leagues could offer tools online that would enable

parents to connect with one another to provide services like carpools. Another example of reducing this instrumental support was the swim club that Family 7 participated in. Family 7 still coordinated travel during the week and noted that some stress with transportation was noted, but all three children practiced at the same facility. Not only did this eliminate the need for carpooling and additional support to facilitate practice, it provided an opportunity for the children to complete their homework prior to arriving home for the night. In both of these situations the families were able to reduce the amount of time dealing with situations that occurred outside of the family unit, allowing them to focus on the family more when they were together, positively benefitting family functioning.

### **Family Support and Challenges**

Limited by conducting only one interview per family members, it appears that the main way that the family supports functioning are through making an effort to spend time together. Families that make a specific effort to spend time together as a family are able to better focus on the individuals that make up the family. This focus on all the members collectively should improve family intimacy, communication, and ultimately functioning.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

After examining the between family data, it appears that all of these families have bought into a system that they knowingly brought high levels of stress into the family system. Whether it is from societal pressure, media influence, peer pressure from other parents or from other children, the families in this study have convinced themselves that it is important to do whatever they can to help out their child athlete pursue his or her dream. This notion had caused these families to put on blinders to the stress and impact that their involvement with the league was having to their family. The families were failing at a key role of the family system, selectively engaging with external systems. The families perceive that enrolling in elite leagues will produce the end goal of a highly skilled athlete.

Most of the families noted a shift from recreational sport to select sport in terms of its structure. Supporting research by Figler and Whitaker (1991), Frey and Eitzen (1991), and Coakley (2009), the parents characterized recreational sport as having greater flexibility, less focus on winning, and an emphasis on fun. Previous research in this area of elite youth sport concluded that this was likely to take away from the enjoyment of the game and place too great an emphasis on winning and skill development (Coakley, 2009). Families in this study noted the emphasis on skill development, but used that as criteria they looked at when selecting or switching clubs. The father from Family 6 was talking about a team they switched his daughter from and said, “The team had some decent players, but then it dropped off because they couldn’t get enough of the good player to play. The competition was at a higher level and they were getting beat like 8-0.



I don't think they scored a goal all year. It's hard to play and learn if you don't have a team that can help you." Most of the parents in this study wanted a team that focused on skill development in order to provide their child with an increase in self-esteem. The father from Family 3 said, "She's very confident in herself. She's proven to herself that she can do some things that she didn't think she could do." The father from Family 7 added, "We are happy with what swimming can do for their health and it can stroke their ego when they are swimming fast." The parents reflected positively on their children's recreational sport, but seemed to feel that a focus on skill development was appropriate for their age and skill level, so they sought a higher skill level through club sport participation. With the transition to leagues with professional coaches and increased expectations, the families were faced with increased time and financial commitments.

### **Time and financial resources**

Past research has shown that in order to participate in select sport that families must make firm financial and time commitments (Coakley, 2009; Thompson, 1999). The cost of elite level youth sport is getting more expensive and Thompson (1999) thoroughly documents the schedules and sacrifices mothers make on a daily basis to keep their child engaged in elite youth sport. This notion of resource commitment was supported in this study as the families noted both the high cost and high time commitment.

Previous research noted that the financial burden was possibly the largest stressor on families enrolled in select clubs (Dixon et al., 2008; Hellstedt, 1995; Kay, 2000). In this study, families noted disagreements with the cost of the leagues, but were able to meet the financial demands of the league. Lower SES families noted some sacrifices due to cost, including limited or no vacations, wearing hand me down clothes, and delaying

family purchases. Despite the disagreement with the overall cost of the league and the trade-offs that families made in order to accommodate the cost, all seven families accepted the cost and planned on enrolling their children in a similar type league for the foreseeable future.

In this study the biggest form of stress that was applied to the family from sport was the role of transportation and the time it cost. Families that had reduced amounts of transportation had generally lower levels of stress and had more time to spend on the family removed from sport. Families in this study had to provide transportation to and from practice between three and six days per week. Games usually took place during the weekends and some families facilitated transportation for sport all seven days of the week. The burden of transportation also consumed time at the house, with typically the mother coordinating and planning who could drive the children to their various activities. In the case of Family 5, they made huge sacrifices, both financially and logistically, in order to enroll their son in an academy that provided almost all of the instrumental support. This family appeared to have the lowest levels of stress and seemed to be the most engaged family outside of sport.

### **Functioning**

According to their McMaster FAD scores, all seven families in this study were operating at either the cut-off or below the cut-off for general functioning, meaning they were generally quite healthy. Mother's typically had the healthiest scores for problem solving, which was reflected in their role of coordinating and planning all of the families activities. Non-athlete siblings consistently had the least healthy affective involvement

scores, indicating that they perceived a situation in which all activities in the family were not equally valued.

Sport participation appeared to impact the family beyond other non-sport activities largely based on the priority that the family gave to sport within the system. Families scheduled their activities around the sport league and limited other expenses for the family based on the cost of the league. With the increased priority that was given to sport, the families also agreed to the high level of expectations set out by the league, further supporting its priority for the family. The level of priority that families place on elite sport even surpassed the priority given to the marital dyad in many cases. This has the potential to adversely impact the entire family system given the status of the marital dyad in the family hierarchy (Broderick, 1993).

### **Other family impacts**

Similar to the families in Thompson's (1999) study and Cote's (1999) research, families in this study noted some characterizations of family burnout from the time demands. The father in Family 6 said that he felt his family was "running in different directions." The oldest sister in Family 6 added that she felt "exhausted" and that her busy schedule was taking a toll on her. Despite the busy schedules, most of the interviews reflected positively on sport and felt that the sacrifices were worth the participation. The father from Family 2 said, "I mean one thing about sports is it definitely takes a lot of time for practices and stuff. But I think from a family perspective overall, I personally see that It's positive because I like to see the kids enjoying being on a team." All of the members from Family 7 spoke of the time demands and difficult practices as a positive. The mother said, "I think they have to learn, if they want

something, they have to work hard for it. I think sports are very good for that. They work hard, take care of their bodies and they are kept busy. Mostly to work hard for something they want to achieve.”

One key issue with the scheduling that arose was the issue of predictability. Some of the families in this study were faced with unpredictable schedules that required problem solving and unplanned alterations to their schedule. The mother in Family 1 noted the difficulties of schedule changes saying, “he would change the practices. I’d go like, ‘Are you joking me? [My oldest son] is not my only child! Baseball is not my only thing. It’s a certain aspect and a very small aspect.’ Yes it’s a time commitment...I have to have some kind of continuity in what’s going on.” The mother from Family 5 talked about a failed attempt to home school their son. “Last year we tried home schooling,” the mother said. “He had been in a private school before that, but hockey was just taking over.” Since the transition to the hockey academy, where both the school schedule and the hockey schedule were set, the family was very happy with both his training and education.

Supporting the research of Cox and Paley (1997), the flexible boundaries between subsystems led to increased communication and more democratic input from the children. The families in this study noted that the decision to ultimately participate is up to the athlete. Six out of seven families had healthy scores on the McMaster FAD and all seven specifically noted high levels of communication. This enabled them to navigate the difficulties of scheduling and coordination of everyone’s activities. The only family member that was sometimes excluded from this loop was the sibling. Often the sibling

did not have equal input into decisions regarding activities, attending practice, and attending games.

Interactions between the sport and family system also supported Broderick's (1993) five reciprocating effects. Families noted that engaging with the sport league led to competition for time and athletes noted instances of spillover. This occurred when the stress from the sport system traveled into the family system. This was most apparent in family 4, who had additional stress within the family due to the role of the mother in the sport league. In addition to working as a letter carrier, the mother served multiple roles in the league, creating additive stress that originates in the sport league and carries over into the family. She spoke of some of the difficulties of trying to call other mothers who were late on payment and how it made her feel uncomfortable. Feelings like this are likely to spillover from one system to another (Broderick, 1993). The father complained about the time that her volunteer work commanded and the other siblings could potentially feel that their sport is not as important to their mother. This may negatively impact cohesion and roles, leading to dysfunction.

Indirect effects included having the financial means to attend tournaments together and participating in the optional clinics. Some families noted indirect effects in terms of limiting other purchases and travel due to the cost, but other families did not show of indirect effects.

Athletes and parents had some signs of reciprocating effects from acquaintances in their interactions with both teammates and parents. The athletes often spoke fondly of their teammates and in some cases equated them to family members. The oldest son in Family 7 described his team, saying, "We're family. We are super close. We hang out all

the time and can talk to each other about everything.” It is likely that these individuals in the sports league have an impact on the athletes, which they bring back to their family. Parents also talked about building good peer relationships through sport. These bonds that they form outside of the family may have a positive impact on their individual development, positively impacting family functioning.

### **Practical Implications**

While not everyone will be able to afford or want to send their children to a sport academy or enroll them in the same sport, however, there are some lessons to be gained. Sport leagues can learn ways that they can ease some of the burden placed on the family. For example, they could provide transportation to/from practice, allow parents more of a voice in scheduling and coaching decisions and attempt to schedule facilities that are central to their participants. If leagues were able to assist parents in transportation, it would not only alleviate a large source of stress and time demanded from the family, it would allow the league to schedule in its best interest. Leagues would not have to cater to the work schedules of the parents if their employees were providing transportation to the athletes. If a league is unable to provide this additional service, allowing the parents to have more of a voice in scheduling could increase the level of engagement of the parents and help the league develop a schedule that would best suit its participants. Granting the parents a voice in coaching decisions might also increase the level of engagement between the parents and the league, but help assure that the majority of the parents are satisfied with the individual who is a coach of their child(ren). The final thing that leagues would be able to do to ease some of the transportation cost to the families would be to select families that are central to their facilities. This would not only aid in

families being able to carpool, but it would cut down on the total transportation time on the family in order to facilitate transportation. This would decrease the time demands placed on the family.

Families can also better educate themselves about the financial and time commitment that it actually takes to participate in a select sport league. If families are able to plan ahead for the time demands and the financial demands of the sport they can select a league that is the best fit for their family. If they are able to plan ahead for the cost and time it will also reduce the strain put on their problem solving and ease to total stress placed on the family from participation in elite youth sport.

Families also need to take emotional stock with what priority sport is given in their family and how much emotional and physical energy from all family members are spent on sport. Most of the families in this study were willing to rearrange their lives and place sport near the top of family priorities. As a result of this prioritizing, other family members are sometimes almost forced into limited activities and limited spending. For example, placing sport with such importance caused the members of Family 5 to live in separate cities.

The emotional energy that families are spending on sport has also taken a toll on the family system. Families often hold sport in such high regard and assume that the sport system in the U.S. is providing the benefits that they seek. With their willingness to accept the system as one that is positive, families are passionate about their child's participation to the point where it is more about the sport and less about the child. Families should challenge the assumption that the sport system their child enrolled in is

the best for their child and the family and research alternative leagues and/or developmental avenues and activities for their children.

Families should be deliberate, consistent, and on-going in evaluating how sport is impacting their individual and collective lives. All children within the family, not just the athlete child, should have a voice in family matters like sport. The time, money, and emotions that are spent on sport impact each and every family member. Decisions should not be made in the supposed best interest of one family member.

### **Future Research**

Future research on family functioning and sport should examine the interpretation of the experience by the family. Do families really buy into the sport experience or what they “should” think about it? Why are families willing to select an elite league over a recreational league that they prefer? Future research should also examine how elite sport impacts the family differently than other elite pursuits.

While this study gained some insights from the siblings, the nature of the research did not afford as much depth as preferred. A study that was similar in nature to Thompson’s (1999) work, in which the researcher spent time throughout the season with multiple seasons. Finally, future studies should try to gain a greater understanding of family functioning throughout the athletic season. A study that covered a family from pre-season, season, and post-season could better highlight specific incidents and document first-hand the impact they had on the family.



## Appendices

### Appendix A

McMaster Family Assessment Device:

Please rank the following from 1 (strongly agree), 2 (agree), 3 (disagree), or 4 (strongly disagree)

#### Problem Solving

We usually act on our decisions regarding problems.

After our family tries to solve a problem, we usually discuss whether it worked or not.

We resolve most emotional upsets that come up.

We confront problems involving feelings.

We try to think of different ways to solve problems.

#### Communication

When someone is upset the others know why.

You can't tell how a person is feeling from what they are saying.

People come right out and say things instead of hinting at them.

We are frank with each other.

We don't talk to each other when we are angry.

When we don't like what someone has done, we tell them.

#### Roles

When you ask someone to do something, you have to check that they did it.

We make sure members meet their family responsibilities.

Family tasks don't get spread around enough.

We have trouble meeting our bills.

There's little time to explore personal interests.

We discuss who is to do household jobs.

If people are asked to do something, they need reminding.

We are generally dissatisfied with the family duties assigned to us.

#### Affective Responsiveness

We are reluctant to show our affection for each other.

Some of us just don't respond emotionally.

We do not show our love for each other.

Tenderness takes second place to other things in our family.

We express tenderness.

We cry openly.

#### Affective Involvement

If someone is in trouble, the others become too involved.

You only get the interest of others when something is important to them.

We are too self-centered.

We get involved with each other only when something interests us.  
We show interest in each other when we can get something out of it personally.  
Our family shows interest in each other only when they can get something out of it.  
Even though we mean well, we intrude too much into each other's lives.

#### Behavior Control

We don't know what to do when an emergency comes up.  
You can easily get away with breaking the rules.  
We know what to do in an emergency.  
We have no clear expectations about toilet habits.  
We have rules about hitting people.  
We don't hold to any rules or standards.  
If the rules are broken, we don't know what to expect.  
Anything goes in our family.  
There are rules about dangerous situations.

#### General Functioning

Planning family activities is difficult because we misunderstand each other.  
In times of crisis we can turn to each other for support.  
We cannot talk to each other about the sadness we feel.  
Individuals are accepted for what they are.  
We avoid discussing our fears and concerns.  
We can express feelings to each other.  
There are lots of bad feelings in the family.  
We feel accepted for what we are.  
Making decisions is a problem for our family.  
We are able to make decisions about how to solve problems.  
We don't get along well together.  
We confide in each other.

## Appendix B

### Interview Guide:

#### **Parent:**

Tell me about the decision you made to initially get your child involved in sport.

Who made the decision to enroll him/her?

Do you still enroll them in sport for the same reasons?

Did you play sports as a child?

What was that like?

Do you still play sports?

What was the first sport your child ever played?

How was that experience for the family?

How has the sport experience changed for you and the family?

What do you hope your child gains from participation?

Do you think they are gaining that?

Do you think that is what they want out of sport?

Tell me about your role with the team and what that entails.

Tell me about a great experience you had with your team.

Tell me about your worst sport experience.

How did that impact your family?

Take me through a typical morning in which there is a game.

Take me through a typical practice.

Do you stay for practice?

How drives the child to practice?

Do you drive other children?

What are your feelings towards your child's coach?

How much would you estimate all of this costs?

Is that a problem?

What other sacrifices does your family make?

Is there anything you would like to see changed in your child's sport league to make it a better experience?

Do you attend any sports as a family?

Do you participate in any sport or activity based programs as a family?

What kinds of things do you talk to about with your spouse?

What kinds of things do you talk to about with your children?

What kinds of things do you talk about with your peers?

Do you watch any television as a family?

What do you watch?

How often?

Do you read about sports?

Where do you read about sports?

How often do you read about sports?

Tell me about how close you think your family is.

Overall, how do you feel that sport is impacting your family?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Participant:**

Why do you play sports?

Tell me about your favorite thing about playing sport.

What do you and your teammates talk about?

Take me through a typical game day.

What does your mom do?

What does your dad do?

What does your sibling do?

Take me through a typical practice.

What does your mom do?

What does your dad do?

What does your sibling do?

When you travel for tournaments, who all travels with you?

Tell me about a great experience you had with your team.

Did you bring the good feelings back home?

Tell me about your worst sport experience.

Did you bring those negative feelings back home?

Do you feel certain family members value sport more than others?  
Who?

Tell me about your coach.  
What do you like about him/her?  
What do you dislike about him/her?

Do you feel that you are missing out on anything else because of your participation in sport?  
What do you wish you had time to do?

What do you talk to your mom about?

What do you talk to your dad about?

What do you talk to your sibling about?

When you need someone to confide in, who do you turn to?

Do you wish your family spent more time together outside of sport?

What other activities does your family engage in outside of sport?  
Is equal time spent on other activities?  
How is that working for you?

How would you describe your family to another person?

What sorts of things create tension in your family?

What sorts of things alleviate tension in your family?

How close are you to other members in your family?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

**Non-participant:**

Do you play any sport or participate in any other activities?  
Tell me about what activities you participate in.

Who from your family attends your activities?

Tell me your best experience in \_\_\_\_\_.  
What did that mean to you?

Tell me your worst experience in \_\_\_\_\_.  
What did that mean to you?

When your brother/sister has a game, do you attend?  
What do you do at the games?  
Who do you talk to at the games?

Do you attend your brother's/sister's practice?  
What do you do during practice?

Do you travel to tournaments with your brother/sister?  
What do you do during tournaments?

What do you talk to your mom about?

What do you talk to your dad about?

What do you talk to your sibling about?

When you need someone to confide in, who do you turn to?

Do you wish your family spent more time together outside of sport?

What other activities does your family engage in outside of sport?  
Is equal time spent on other activities?  
How is that working for you?

How would you describe your family to another person?

What sorts of things create tension in your family?

What sorts of things alleviate tension in your family?

How close are you to other members in your family?

Is there anything else you would like to add?

## Appendix C

### Background Questionnaire

What is your annual income?\_\_\_\_\_

What is the highest level of education completed?\_\_\_\_\_

Do both parents work?\_\_\_\_\_

What is your ethnicity?\_\_\_\_\_

Please indicate how many children you have, their gender, their age, and if they participate in sport\_\_\_\_\_

Gender	Age	Sport Y?N
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

How much time do you spend on sport per week?\_\_\_\_\_

How much money do you spend on sport annually?\_\_\_\_\_

How many tournaments per year do you travel to?\_\_\_\_\_

How many days per week do you practice?\_\_\_\_\_

How much time per week is spent on non-sport family activities?\_\_\_\_\_

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